

**ICBL Comments on States Parties' Updates on the Status of Implementation
Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education
and Mine Action Technologies
5 June 2008
Delivered by Tamar Gabelnick, International Campaign to Ban Landmines**

Part I: States Parties with 2009-2010 deadlines

Thank you Mr. Co-chair,

Today we have thankfully returned to important business of monitoring progress towards completion of Article 5 obligations within 10 years, rather than considering cases where that completion will need to be delayed.

The ICBL was pleased to hear the progress reported by those remaining states with 2009 and 2010 deadlines. It appears that this time next year we may be facing a smaller percentage of countries requesting an extension, and we note that those signaling a need for an extension, such as Cambodia, generally fit the category of states with exceptionally heavy contamination for which the extension possibility was designed. We can hope that the states that joined the treaty at a later date have learned lessons about starting the work early in the process in respect of the treaty's obligation to complete the work as soon as possible and no later than 10 years from entry into force of the treaty. States Parties' increasing reference to land release techniques other than manual clearance is surely playing a role in these states' increased efficiency as well, and we encourage this approach to continue. But we also note the almost universal calls for international cooperation and assistance to ensure the final steps of mine clearance can be undertaken and we call on donor countries to continue their support until this work is done, while noting that national authorities should also make a special effort to provide additional resources.

We would like to congratulate Malawi and France on completing their obligations under Article 5 before their 2009 deadlines. We are also very pleased to hear that Uganda, Albania, Rwanda, and Tunisia aim to finish their Article 5 obligations before their respective deadlines.

We understand that Niger is unable to confirm at this time the presence of antipersonnel mines in areas under their jurisdiction or control given the ongoing internal conflict, the lack of access to the northern region, and the lack of information about whether non-state armed groups have using antipersonnel mines in addition to the confirmed presence of anti-vehicle mines. But certain incidents since the beginning of 2007 do not appear to be consistent with antivehicle mines given their relatively limited effects. We would therefore recommend that Niger request a short extension, as set out in its Cabinet Decision of 12 March 2008, to allow for further clarification of the situation. Such an extension would, of course, not need to be taken advantage of if the lack of presence of AP mines can be confirmed before Niger's 1 September 2009 deadline.

We do understand the exceptional circumstances that delayed the extension request submission by Chad, and we look forward to reading the request this summer.

We hope the generally positive news we heard this morning will continue into the afternoon. Thank you.

Part II: States Parties with 2011+ deadlines

We would like to start by expressing our appreciation to Algeria for the warm tribute to it paid to Steven Olejas, who before working in Algeria was for many years head of DanChurchAid's mine action program, and an active contributor to the ICBL's mine action policy work. We also miss him dearly. We would also like to pay tribute to the Afghanistan deminers who were tragically killed over the past year by armed groups while they were engaged in their demining work, acts that the ICBL and others publicly condemned.

Turning to the countries that have presented this afternoon, there is a wide variety among the states in terms of the level of progress made and the preparation of work for coming years. We are hearing some countries report significantly larger areas than in past years, mostly a reflection of the new or better use of land release techniques. Another positive element we heard this afternoon is the movement of several states toward national ownership of their mine action programs. Of course we were very glad to hear several states predict on time, if not early, completion of their Article 5 obligations, and we want to express our recognition for the hard work and political commitment behind these expected accomplishments.

On the other hand, we find it disappointing that several states – especially several with 2011 deadlines - are only just now conducting surveys to identify mined areas, so many years after joining the convention. Obviously good surveys are critical to producing an effective mine action strategic plan and one wonders how the clearance work could have been organized before this vital step has been taken and why it took so long to perform them.

In some states the extent of mine contamination, and indeed even whether antipersonnel mines remain or are present in the territory, has still to be clarified. Perhaps there are other SPs, in particular the Republic of Congo and Zambia, that like Malawi and Swaziland will be able to fulfill their Article 5 obligations without extensive clearance work.

We have heard a few countries speak of competing resources in national budgets, which certainly must be recognized. But mine clearance should not be thought of as a stand-alone issue in competition with other priorities. Indeed, as we heard in detail from the LMAD contact group, mine clearance goes hand in hand with the promotion of safety, health, education, and overall economic and social development of the population and should be an integral part of poverty reduction programs. This is, of course, addition to the legal commitment states parties undertook to clear such areas as soon as possible when they joined the Mine Ban Treaty.

Finally, Mr. Co-chair, we would like to encourage all mine-affected states parties to look closely at the extension requests submitted this year, not just because they will need to take a decision on them in November, but also – as the ICRC outlined - because their preparation in accordance with the suggested format appears to have been a positive planning exercise that might be useful for other states to undertake and report on regardless of whether they will need an extension.

Thank you