

Thursday, 5 June 2008

Standing Committee on Mine Clearance: Process of preparing and analysing extension requests
Opportunity for comments on the updates provided -
Switzerland

Mr. President, Your Royal Highness,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this morning's presentations.

I would like to begin by congratulating your Highness, the Co-Chairs, and the Co-Rapporteurs for your commitment to the Convention and the intense work done in the preparation of this Standing Committee on Mine Clearance and in leading through the extension requests analysis process.

I would like to assure you of the full support and cooperation of my delegation.

For Switzerland, the full respect of the engagements of the Mine Ban Treaty is one of our core principles. The respect of mine clearance obligations under article 5 is essential to definitively reduce the human sufferings caused by the negative impact of landmines (and explosive remnants of war) on people, communities and on their development.

The deadline of ten years for complete demining envisaged in the Convention calendar must in principle be met by all States Parties. The treaty allows for demands for extensions, only to States with severe contamination. In Nairobi, States reiterated that "few if any" should need to ask for extensions.

This year we have to take decisions on the first extension demands. We strongly believe that the analysis of the extension requests will show us how to better identify problems, build up a confidence process, and how to better deal in the future, ahead of the expected deadlines, with serious cases of mined areas being left to be cleared.

Mr. President,

The first stage of analysis of the requests has shown that some States parties have valid reasons to ask for extension, while others have less convincing arguments. The quality of the different requests and their translation into mine action programs vary a lot. We welcome and congratulate those countries that have already shown progress and provided realistic national plans within their requests. Let's take these requests as an example for future candidates.

My country is aware of the big difficulties, the costs involved and the slowness of mine clearance and agrees that progress has been sometimes disappointing. Moreover, many States parties have submitted incomplete requests for extension, missing important requirements, such as precisions about timeframes and indications about future plans. It is difficult if not impossible to decide on an incomplete request.

To address these issues of concern, Switzerland encourages the requesting States to use all existing and new channels of cooperation, that is to consult with States, with international organizations and NGOs regionally and globally, in order to find together concrete solutions so as to conform with the requirements of the Convention.

Switzerland encourages States with incomplete requests to review them urgently accurately before submitting them for final decision at the 9th Meeting of the States Parties. We therefore urge the requesting countries to take advantage of the services offered by the ISU in order to improve the quality of their requests and of their mine action programs.

We encourage States which have not yet done so, to present a national plan: a comprehensive and realistic picture of the number of mines left, of the costs and the resources necessary and available.

Also States who require an extension but have not yet submitted a request need to do so without delay, in time for the 9 MSP to consider it.

Mr. President,

Switzerland would like to encourage States parties with mine clearance deadlines to make use of the *land release* method, which can help to speed up the process of mine clearance at a lower cost, while mitigating the risks.

Switzerland congratulates Norway, the GICHD and UNMAS for their hard work in promoting this process of *land release* forward and looks forward to this afternoon's discussion on methods which permit to release more rapidly suspected areas. We are convinced that the discussion, under the leadership of Norway, as Coordinator of the Resource Utilization Contact Group, will yield results which can be referred to the 9 MSP for consideration.

Land release methods permit to reduce the planning costs of strategies, reduce the amount of necessary financial resources, including the costs of machines and helps identify priorities.

Mr. President,

Finally, I would like to recall that we strongly invite countries to adopt the International Mine Action Standards which can help to fulfil in an efficient way their obligations under art. 5. We also invite these countries to take fully advantage of the services provided by the GICHD.

I would like to stress again that the respect of the rules of the Convention, and in particular of Article 5, is crucial for the credibility of the Convention.

Thank you.