



ICRC

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

12th meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, Geneva, 3-7 December 2012

Opening address by Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Anniversaries are often an occasion for both celebration and sober reflection. The fifteenth anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention's opening for signature today is no different. It offers an opportune moment to take stock of progress made in recent years towards the eradication of anti-personnel landmines worldwide and, more importantly, a timely reminder of the enduring deadly legacy of these weapons and the challenges still ahead. This anniversary should rally States to renew their commitment to achieving the goals of the Convention.

In many respects, the achievements over the past 15 years have indeed been impressive. The use and production of anti-personnel mines has curbed dramatically, while data on mine clearance, stockpile destruction and casualty rates – documented in detail in the Landmine Monitor reports, and which I don't need to repeat here – attest to the undeniable progress over the years in eliminating these weapons and the threats they pose to civilians.

But the progress achieved so far is being offset by faltering implementation of several of the Convention's key requirements, the effects of which the ICRC is witnessing first-hand in the field.

In many of the 27 contexts worldwide where the ICRC carries out weapon contamination programmes, the majority of mines and other explosive devices are concentrated in agricultural and grazing lands, irrigation systems, residential areas and roads. As the Convention community well knows, this has a disastrous impact on civilians, not just in terms of physical and psychological suffering, but also in terms of economic and social costs.

Against this backdrop, the ICRC is deeply concerned by the slow rate of clearance in a number of States Parties with mined areas. We are aware that mine clearance is a painstaking and long process but we are nevertheless disturbed that many States Parties still do not know the full extent of their mined areas, or are falling behind in their clearance plans. There is an urgent need to translate promises into action, to get the job done.

Where the necessary capacity and expertise is lacking, the ICRC can provide technical and capacity-building support to help States survey and clear mined areas, and ultimately to meet their clearance responsibilities. In situations of urgent humanitarian concern, and when no other relevant actors are available, the ICRC can carry out clearance activities itself.

Until mines and other explosive remnants of war are cleared, however, it is essential to reduce their impact as far as possible. Cambodia, Colombia and Georgia are just three diverse contexts where the ICRC and the National Red Cross Society undertake risk reduction activities, such as establishing safe access to water, food and other vital necessities, or implementing micro-credit projects to discourage people from engaging in risky activities.

While there has been encouraging progress on implementing the Convention's victim assistance requirements, no amount of fine words and encouraging facts and figures will change the harsh reality of life for people permanently disabled by such weapons, and who have little if any access to the services they need. For a vast number of victims of landmines and other explosive remnants of war in affected countries across the globe, States' commitments have yet to be translated into a tangible reality.

Take Afghanistan, for example, where I visited in July on my first overseas mission since taking up my current position as president of the ICRC. On one hand, I was shocked to see the overwhelming extent of survivors' needs in what was, admittedly, one of the most heavily mined countries in the world, and which has made considerable progress in combating this legacy. On the other hand, I was impressed and humbled by the resilience and determination of many of these individuals.

At Mirwais regional hospital in Kandahar, I saw a group of children being admitted after stumbling onto a landmine or other explosive device. Their horrific injuries do not bear repeating. At the ICRC's physical rehabilitation centre in Kabul, I saw dozens of amputees with newly fitted limbs learning to walk again, step by painful step. The centre's 250 or so locally-hired staff are all disabled, many of them by anti-personnel landmines. All of them have defied suffering and hardship to attain a degree of independence. Many of their patients have done likewise with the help of loans from the ICRC's micro-credit programme that has helped them to establish small businesses.

Even if there is not a single new mine incident worldwide, there will be enough work for many decades looking after people injured by mines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war. In addition to tackling medical and physical rehabilitation needs, this requires addressing the continuing social, economic and physical barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

On this, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I would like to pay special tribute to the survivors of these weapons, in the knowledge that people with disabilities in countries where the ICRC intervenes are often among the most vulnerable yet most overlooked groups. The institution is developing a disability-inclusive approach in its programmes, and I take this opportunity today to call on all States to adhere to the important UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In view of the enduring legacy of anti-personnel landmines worldwide, and the scale of consequences they have produced, it is clear that little can be achieved without the firm political, human and financial commitment of States. I urge all States Parties to renew the promises they made to do away with anti-personnel mines forever and to take concrete actions to ensure that landmine survivors and their families have access to the services they need for the rest of their lives.

Fifteen years ago, through their vision and determination, the States Parties made the complete elimination of anti-personnel mines a possibility and a legally binding commitment. Let this be the day that will be remembered for a tangible renewal of that leadership and commitment by States Parties to the Convention. Then it would be an anniversary really worth celebrating.

Thank you.