

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

Fourteenth Meeting of States Parties

National Statement of Australia

Tuesday 1 December 2015

Mr President

Thank you for your assiduous efforts in support of the Convention over what has been a difficult period for its operations. We have been pleased to support your efforts as a “friend of the president”. We are hopeful, as we are sure all states are, that all of the hard work will be rewarded with decisions here at this meeting on a four year workplan and budget, financial governance and staffing which will provide the predictability necessary for the Implementation Support Unit to fulfil its mandate. We continue to pledge our support to these efforts.

Mr President

Australia wishes to note its appreciation of the work of the former Director of the Implementation Support Unit, Mr Kerry Brinkert, for his long and dedicated service to the Convention. He oversaw a maturation of the convention, through which the mine action community has developed a strong and effective response to the challenge of landmine contamination. We wish also to thank interim Director Mr Juan Carlos Ruan and his team for expertly maintaining the Implementation Support Unit’s operations while the work of finding a new Director continues. We look forward to the appointment of the new Director and greater stability for the Unit in 2016.

Mr President

In response to the significant humanitarian threat anti-personnel mines pose to the civilian population decades after their deployment, Australia has contributed over 125 million Australian dollars under its Mine Action Strategy for the Australian Aid Program since 2010. The funds were directed to reducing the threat and socio-economic impact of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war: the loss of lives and limbs, the loss of livelihoods and the loss of economic productivity.

Our support included contributions both to international organisations working in the field and direct funding to countries including Afghanistan, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and several countries in East Africa and the Middle East.

We are proud to be associated with international efforts to render Mozambique free of anti-personnel landmines and congratulate the Government of Mozambique, donors and international organisations associated with this marvellous achievement.

Mr President

An independent review of Australia's Mine Action Strategy has been completed and will be available to interested parties shortly. We would like to thank all of those who freely gave their time to the consultant who conducted the review on behalf of the Australian Government.

The review finds that the strategy ...”has been effective in improving the quality of life for victims and reducing the number of deaths and injuries from landmine, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. Australia’s work to synergise its strategy for inclusive development with victim assistance has been highly commended... Respondents also indicated that Australia has made a significant contribution to the sector, in particular through its focus on capacity building of countries and its effective leadership and advocacy at the international level.”

The objectives of the strategy continue to be important to Australia. We will continue to work closely with our international partners in pursuit of the objectives of this Convention and the others associated with mine action. Australia will continue to fund mine clearance work and support to victims in partnership with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the International Committee for the Red Cross through its Special Fund for the Disabled, Geneva Centre for International Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines and the Land Mine Monitor.

We also fund Geneva Call which works with non-state actors to reduce the use of land mines. According to the Landmine Monitor non-state actors are significant contributors to the new use of anti-personnel landmines. We value Geneva Call’s contribution to this important area of work.

We recognise that many states are struggling to maintain previous levels of funding to the Mine Ban Convention and mine action. We too have experienced a significant cut to our funding in this area. We urge states to continue to contribute to this important work and to make available funds to ensure the viability of the Implementation Support Unit.

The Implementation Support Unit provides valuable administrative support to the operation of the Convention and to states to assist us to meet our obligations under the convention. We encourage states to make an ongoing financial commitment, in spite of current difficult financial times, because there is still more that needs to be done. The short-term costs of contributions are far outweighed by the long-term benefits of having a functional Implementation Support Unit with adequate technical expertise to support States implement their Convention obligations.

Australia has contributed close to 1.25 million Australian dollars to the Implementation Support Unit since 2010, including 120,000 Australian dollars a year over the last three years, and we intend to continue with this level of support. We strongly encourage other States to contribute, as they are able, to sustaining the critical work of the Unit.

Mr President

Victim Assistance has been a significant focus of Australia's contribution to mine action. Approximately 20 per cent of our mine action funding goes to victim assistance. Our approach to victim assistance is to focus on building appropriate and sustained capacities within affected states to address both the immediate and long-term challenges of victim assistance. Australia has also been working with partners to support the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of victims, with an emphasis on improving well-being and livelihoods.

In May this year Australia launched *Development for All 2015-2020*, our second disability-inclusive development strategy which aims to strengthen disability inclusion across our aid program, in order to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, including victims of land mines, in developing countries.

As part of this effort Australia presented an outline of our work and approach, and highlighted the importance of ensuring non-discrimination and respect for the rights of mine victims, through a presentation to the Bangkok Symposium on Landmine Victim Assistance in June this year.

We have also commenced work in collaboration with Handicap International, Austria, Chile and Iraq to develop a working paper "by States, for States" on the integration of assistance to victims of mines and explosive remnants of war into broader development, disability and human rights frameworks.

While we are pursuing this initiative as co-coordinators of Victim Assistance and Cooperation and Assistance under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, we intend to share the outcomes of our work with our counterparts in the Coordinating Committee of the Ottawa Convention and those working on victim assistance under other conventions, as the lessons to be learned regarding support for victims are the same irrespective of the weapons and legal instrument concerned.

Mr President

Australia has been pleased to serve as informal Sponsorship Coordinator for the Ottawa Convention, and to have contributed around 30,000 Australian dollars annually to the program since 2010.

The Program supports broad participation in the work of the Convention, particularly by States Parties with few means that bear the burden of contamination and which are in the process of clearing mined areas, assisting victims and destroying stockpiles. It is an essential means of enabling Convention Committees to engage directly with these States Parties and provides an opportunity for States Parties so to fulfil their Convention obligations to assist such States if they are in a position to do so.

It is therefore with great concern that we note that funding for the Sponsorship Programme is almost exhausted. We urgently need more States Parties, which are in a position to do so, to invest in this Programme in 2016. By contributing to the Programme, States Parties can help meet their own Convention obligations on cooperation and assistance. We will have more to say on this in our formal report on the Programme later this week.

Mr President

We urge states parties to dedicate themselves to finishing what we have begun. So much has been achieved but there remain challenges ahead. Australia continues to commit itself to the Ottawa Treaty and the completion of this important humanitarian work.

Thank you Mr President.