

States must keep their word to landmine survivors and mine-affected communities - Ninth Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty opens in Geneva today (24 Nov. 2008)

Geneva, 24 November 2008 – Eleven years after the signing of the Mine Ban Treaty, **survivors of landmine blasts are still waiting for the assistance due to them under the treaty**, said the Nobel Peace laureate *International Campaign to Ban Landmines* (ICBL) today. Members of the ICBL from over 50 countries will make the voice of civil society heard at the 9th Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty (9MSP), starting today in Geneva, Switzerland. During the meeting, hundreds of delegates from governments, international agencies and civil society will assess progress in implementing the treaty's provisions.

“We urge states to keep their word and to fulfill the promises made over a decade ago to landmine survivors, their families and communities. Concrete action to address the needs and promote the rights of survivors is needed, and survivors must be fully included in the decision-making processes,” said Margaret Arach Orech, ICBL Ambassador and landmine survivor from Uganda. Twenty-five States Parties with the highest number of survivors have identified victim assistance objectives to meet before the Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty in 2009, but most of them have made little progress on the ground over the last years.

Delegates to the 9MSP will also decide **whether to grant extensions to 15 states unable to meet their 2009 deadline for mine clearance**. “With total disregard for the commitment they made when joining the Mine Ban Treaty, the United Kingdom and Venezuela have no plans to conduct any demining operations before their 10-year deadline. Other governments have been working far too slowly. The lack of urgency displayed by these countries in removing their mines from the ground shows a lack of respect for the treaty and for the people living on a daily basis with the landmine threat,” said Tamar Gabelnick, ICBL Treaty Implementation Director. Extension requests were submitted earlier this year and analyzed by a group of states and external experts, including the ICBL. They will be decided upon during the course of the week. “States Parties must find the courage to speak out against unjustified extension requests and turn down those that undermine the treaty,” added Gabelnick.

On 1 March this year, Belarus, Greece and Turkey **failed to meet their four-year deadline to destroy their antipersonnel landmine stockpiles**, which means they are in violation of the treaty. They collectively stockpile six million antipersonnel landmines. “Stockpile destruction is crucial as a destroyed mine will never claim a life or limb. It is a powerful and indispensable preventative measure,” explained Sylvie Brigot, ICBL Executive Director. While Belarus has long indicated it depended on much-delayed aid to destroy its mines, Greece and Turkey have never warned of financial or technical problems. Greece has yet to destroy any stockpiled mines.

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Background

The Mine Ban Treaty was signed in Ottawa, Canada on 3 December 1997. In the same year, the ICBL and its then coordinator Jody Williams were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their role in achieving the treaty. As of November 2008, 156 states have joined the treaty and 39 still remain outside.

Fifteen States Parties with 2009 mine clearance deadlines have declared they would not meet them and have requested an extension: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Jordan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, Senegal, Thailand, the United Kingdom, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

The 9th Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty will take place at the Palais des Nations in Geneva from 24-28 November 2008.

Landmine Monitor Report 2008, the ICBL's monitoring initiative, reports on ban policy, demining, casualties, risk education, victim assistance and support for mine action in 120 countries and areas: www.icbl.org/lm/2008. It was released on Friday 21 November 2008.