

Mine-Affected States Given Clearance Extensions But Told to Work Urgently (28 Nov. 2008)

Geneva, 28 November 2008 – Under pressure from the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty and civil society, the United Kingdom announced that it will immediately begin demining the Falkland Islands and reaffirmed its commitment to their full clearance as soon as possible. This was the most contentious issue at the annual Meeting of States Parties which concluded today in Geneva.

Under threat of a possible rejection of their request to extend their treaty deadline another 10 years, the UK also agreed to return in less than 1.5 years with a detailed plan for demining the islands and to report on a regular basis about concrete progress made.

The UK was, however, granted the requested 10-year extension. This is the maximum extension period allowed under the treaty and was intended for severely contaminated states already engaged in mine clearance. The UK has still to clear a single mined area since joining the treaty in 1999. The ICBL has called for the rejection of any request for an extension of mine clearance duties for any State Party that fails to begin clearance within its original 10-year deadline.

Mine clearance deadline extensions were also granted to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Jordan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, Senegal, Thailand, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe. “The process to grant these extensions was ultimately taken seriously by all parties, though we regret that the final decisions did not always apply the same vigorous standards to all,” said Steve Goose, head of the ICBL delegation to the 9th Meeting of the States Parties. “We felt that Venezuela got off rather easily given the fact that it, like the UK, has not begun any demining operations in the past 9 years.” States Parties did officially encourage Venezuela, as well as Ecuador, Peru, Senegal, and the UK, to complete demining in less time than they were granted in their extension.

The pressure exerted by civil society and the extremely serious concerns expressed by States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty resulted in positive declarations from Belarus, Greece, Turkey, which have been in violation of the treaty since they missed their 1 March 2008 stockpile destruction deadline. Greece announced it had started stockpile destruction this week and intended to finish in mid-2009, Turkey stated that it has destroyed almost 800,000 mines in 2008 and aimed to finish destruction in early 2010, and Belarus re-stated its need for much-delayed financial assistance.

Fifteen mine survivors from the ICBL delegation urged the 26 States Parties with the greatest number of survivors to take concrete actions to ensure that real progress on the ground is made by the next treaty meeting, and to answer the need for socio-economic inclusion of survivors in addition to medical assistance. They deplored that victim assistance remains seen as a lower priority than stockpile destruction and demining programs.

Civil society expressed concern that for the first time since the Mine Ban Treaty entered into force in 1999, no new state has joined the treaty over a 12-month period. The ICBL called on all States Parties to renew and increase their diplomatic initiatives, in collaboration with all actors engaged in universalization of the treaty.

The Second Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty will take place in Cartagena, Colombia, in November 2009. States Parties will then assess ten years of progress in keeping the promises made to mine survivors and mine-affected communities.