

Clearing Mined Areas -- Statement on behalf of the mine clearance NGOs of the ICBL

Second Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction
Review of the operation and status of the Convention: Clearing mined areas
Statement on behalf of the mine clearance NGOs of ICBL
Cartagena, 1 December 2009

Clearance of mined areas is crucial to achieve the humanitarian objective of the Mine Ban Treaty. Only when land is cleared is the threat to the population removed and the path to development opened.

As can be seen from the statements today, a lot has been achieved in terms of clearance in the last 10 years. More than 1.100 square kilometres of land was cleared in this period as reported by the Landmine Monitor. Hundreds of thousands of people can again use their land for housing, agriculture and grazing. Hundreds of thousands of people can drive on roads which are now safe again. Thousands of previously cut-off communities are able to interact freely and be accessed by development and relief agencies.

When looking back at the first years of clearance under this convention, we can see that the methodology and approach was different from what is being used today. As in any new sector we have had to cope with a challenging learning curve to adapt and improve our approaches. In retrospect, we can see that clearance tasks were often approached without critical assessment and without taking into account the different types and nature of mined areas and the real impact on the affected populations. Mine action was quite often also executed separately from other relief and development activities. A contributing factor to this situation were poor cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms in post-conflict and development countries.

Speaking as clearance operators, we can say that today's mine action toolbox is proof that we have learned and improved continuously over the last 10 years, and that we are serious in our aim to perform our work in the best way possible and to the highest possible standards. Today we have better and more nuanced methodologies to deal with mined and suspected mined areas. These methodologies ensure that the right resources are deployed in tandem with the right method suited for a particular task – and consequently that land is released back to the beneficiaries as soon as possible. This development is reflected in the clearance figures. The new Landmine Monitor reports that in 2008 alone mine action programs cleared almost 160 square kilometres of mined areas – the highest total ever recorded.

With improving community liaison and survey methodologies, we also believe that we are ensuring that the cleared areas are actually of highest value to the impacted population, as defined by the population itself as well as the relevant country's development plans. Dear Madam President, we believe that it is crucial to maintain this momentum and we fully support the Cartagena Action Plan on Article 5 which seeks recommitment and rededication of the affected and donor states parties to ensure continued clearance of mined areas. National ownership of the mine problem is crucial for effective clearance to take place. There is a proven correlation between national ownership and better results in clearance operations. For national ownership to have maximum impact there must be effective support to national capacity in 2 each affected country, also to ensure continuity with dealing with the residual problem in the years to come. We are thus encouraging affected states in cooperation with the donor community to ensure that the capacity support provided to build these organisations and institutions consists of sufficiently qualified people with clearly defined terms of reference and benchmarks which respond to the defined needs of the affected country.

Coordination of our activities with responsible UN agencies is crucial for good implementation of our joint work. We believe that coordination can no longer only mean allocating tasks in the limited mine action setting, but also needs to increase linkages with development. With this in mind, we do not believe that the increased emphasis on commercial contracting by the UN will be the way to meet the ambitions of the Cartagena Action Plan. Poorly prepared tender documents and poorly executed tender procedures delay clearance operations and

consequently deny palpable results for the beneficiaries. Moreover, while activities like community liaison and survey are integral parts of our work, they are difficult to quantify when measured in purely commercial terms. These activities carry immense benefits for the population on the ground and continue to improve our work and ensure that the linkage with development is achieved and maintained.

The mine action community thus has a responsibility to ensure that all actors adhere to the same standards of accountability and transparency of funds spent.

Madam President, The Cartagena Action Plan lays out a strategic plan for the next 5 year period. However most of the funding is still provided on a short term annual basis. We believe that much better results will be achieved, if more States Parties would follow the good examples of the few donors who are already providing multi-year grants.

In conclusion, we, the clearance operators are fully committed to getting the job done, and we remain committed to scrutinizing all possible approaches to improving our clearance efforts together with the States Parties and other actors and prove that this is indeed a mission possible.

Thank you.

This statement has been issued on behalf of DanChurchAid (DCA), Danish Demining Group (DDG), Handicap International (HI), Landmine Action, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).