

# **Bangkok Workshop on Achieving a Mine-Free South-East Asia, 1-3 April 2009**

In the first week of April 2009, members of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) gathered in Bangkok, Thailand to conduct advocacy and outreach in support of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. This was the second in a series of regional meetings convened in the lead-up to the treaty's Second Review Conference, which will take place in Cartagena, Colombia in the week of 30 November 2009.

Government representatives from 18 countries attended the workshop: Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar (Burma), Nepal, New Zealand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States.

The ICBL delegation to Bangkok was comprised of campaigners and mine action experts from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Nepal, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, and elsewhere including four mine survivors, plus two ICBL staff members from the Geneva office. Three Thai demining NGOs participated in the workshop: General Chatichai Choonhavan Foundation (GCCF), and Mekong Organisation for Mankind (MOM), Peace Road Organisation Foundation (PRO).

Several ICBL representatives participated in an HI workshop on 30 March on Victim Assistance and International Cooperation and Assistance, and most campaigners took part in an NGO victim assistance workshop on 31 March. The ICBL and Cluster Munition Coalition also held a joint campaign prep meeting prior to the Bangkok Workshop to prepare for lobbying during the week and held consultations with their respective members on the future of both coalitions.

On 1 April, the workshop participants split into two groups to undertake field trips. The victim assistance group visited the Prostheses Foundation and the Yardsong Vocational and Rehabilitation Training Centre for Disabled in Chiang Mai, while a separate group visited demining sites along the Cambodian border in Sa Kaew province. Thailand was keen to use the demining visit to attract more donor interest in its mine action programme. The clearance deadline of 1 May 2009 was extended for 9 ½ years at the end of 2008.

The Thai Minister of Foreign Affairs opened the conference on 2 April with a call on Southeast Asian nations still outside the convention to join it quickly. He and the conference chair – the Thai Ambassador to the UN in Geneva – both made calls for a peaceful resolution to the border tensions so that demining of those areas could take place. ICBL Ambassador Tun Channareth spoke to his captive audience about his life experience, making the case that just as he overcame his personal challenges as a survivor, the international community can reach its goal of a mine-free world if it has enough determination and energy.

The Bangkok Workshop was notable for the active participation of diplomats from states that have not joined the Mine Ban Treaty. Several delegates contributed to the discussion on universalization on 3 April. Lao PDR noted the measures that it has undertaken recently to move toward becoming a member of the treaty and expressed interest in submitting a voluntary Article 7 transparency report. Singapore also listed the initiatives it has taken against the “indiscriminate use of antipersonnel mines,” including its indefinite export moratorium on all types of antipersonnel mines that was enacted in 1998. Myanmar/Burma said it has been following progress of the Mine Ban Treaty and urged action to address transfers and exports of antipersonnel mines.

The ICBL was encouraged by the participation of these non-states parties as well as Nepal and Sri Lanka, but expressed concern about Singapore and Myanmar/Burma focusing only on “indiscriminate use” because the very nature of antipersonnel mines makes *all* use of the weapon indiscriminate. Colombia made a useful statement on the challenges it has faced as a state party that is engaged in conflict with non state armed groups noting that “you can never be completely ready, but we took the opportunity and signed the Mine Ban Treaty.”

There were several presentations and interventions on the thematic areas of the Mine Ban Treaty, including by non states parties (eg. Nepal, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam on demining). Both Cambodia and Thailand reported on their efforts to get a better idea of their real level of mine contamination. Cambodia will be asking this year for a 10-year extension of its deadline. In a presentation on transparency reporting, Indonesia said that in future it would report on its use of antipersonnel mines retained for training. Thailand said it is in the process of passing

an executive measure to “ensure that the military, the police, and other domestic agencies do not violate the Convention.”

New Zealand announced that it would likely be represented at ministerial level at the Second Review Conference in Cartagena, Colombia at the end of 2009, and encouraged other countries to commit to attending at the highest possible level. Indonesia said a constructive spirit was necessary to ensure that help is provided to States Parties that need it due to limited resources and competing priorities.

A parallel meeting was held on Victim Assistance during most of the workshop with 35 representatives from governments, rehabilitation centres, the ICRC, ICBL, non-governmental service providers, and other victim assistance experts, including several landmine survivors. They produced a list of 18 areas for further consideration as part of the preparation for the Second Review Conference, including sustainability, ownership, accessibility, quality improvement, and synergy among international legal instruments.

At the conclusion of the Bangkok Workshop, the ICBL representatives participated in a one-hour briefing on the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions held by the Cluster Munition Coalition in cooperation with Australia and Lao PDR. The ICRC and UNDP also spoke. Approximately a dozen states attended including non-signatories Cambodia and Thailand.

The ICBL issued a media advisory (30 March) and a press statement (2 April), which secured some media interest, mainly concerning continued mine use in Myanmar/Burma (e.g. Voice of America, BBC, Radio Free Asia).

The ICBL did not take any media questions on the border tensions between Cambodia and Thailand. As the workshop opened, a Thai soldier stepped on a landmine while on patrol in the disputed area around Preah Vihear temple on the Cambodian border, losing his left leg.