

# ICBL Campaigners Advocate for a Mine-Free Central Asia

In the second week of July, members of the ICBL gathered in Dushanbe, Tajikistan for the *Dushanbe Workshop on Achieving a Mine-Free Central Asia* to conduct advocacy and outreach in support of the Mine Ban Treaty, as well as the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This was the third in a series of regional meetings convened in the lead-up to the Mine Ban Treaty's Second Review Conference, which will take place in Cartagena, Colombia in the week of 30 November 2009.

**Government representatives** from 13 countries attended the workshop, including 5 countries from the region: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, plus the following donor states: Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In addition the following international and non-governmental organizations were present: European Council and European Commission, ICRC, International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Assistance (ITF), OSCE, Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD), NPA, Tajik Red Crescent Society, UNDP, Unicef, UNMAS, UNODA, and others.

**The ICBL delegation** to Dushanbe was comprised of campaigners and victim assistance experts from Afghanistan, Russia, and Tajikistan, including three mine survivors, plus two ICBL staff members from the Geneva office. Prior to the workshop, the ICBL held a campaign coordination meeting to prepare for lobbying in the following days.

Tajikistan's Minister of Justice and Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law opened the conference on 7 July with a call on Central Asian neighbors still outside the treaty to join. ICBL Treaty Implementation Officer Firoz Ali Alizada also spoke in the **high-level opening** about his life experience as a landmine survivor and called on states to recommit this year to a mine-free world .

The ICBL set the scene for the workshop with Bakhtiyor Begmuradov of the Tajik Campaign providing in Russian an **overview of the status of the treaty in the region**.

The workshop focused on **three case studies on cooperation in implementing the mine clearance obligations** of the treaty. The first one on **Tajikistan** featured presentations and interventions by mine action operators, partners, and donors active in Tajikistan. There was not, however, much discussion about the extension Tajikistan is requesting for its clearance deadline of 1 April 2010. At the moment Tajikistan believes it would need almost 10 years to complete its clearance obligations, whereas the ICBL presented its view that Tajikistan should be able to finish in 5 years if sufficient international assistance was forthcoming. Germany committed to continue supporting mine action in Tajikistan, and Japan noted it was part of the extensions analyzing group.

The second case study on **Afghanistan** was largely covered by the Director of the Mine Action Coordination Center of Afghanistan, who highlighted roles of both the government and the UN in the national mine action program, which is the world's biggest demining program. He also stated that Afghanistan would "clear most if not all of the contamination within the treaty deadline, by 2013." The ICBL provided perspectives on the role of NGOs in mine clearance in the country and the remaining challenges. Japan and Canada spoke on behalf of donors, recommending full national ownership of the mine action program and wished for more transparent and frequent information on the progress made and challenges remaining.

The workshop's third case study focused on **regional cooperation, with the OSCE and ITF** presenting their new initiative on promoting cooperation on mine action in the region, with future plans of creating a regional mine action coordination center for Central Asia, building on the experience in South-East Europe. This year the OSCE and ITF carry out initial discussions on a bilateral basis with the countries of Central Asia, and intend to move on to the phase of multilateral discussions next year, if all interested countries support this initiative.

The Dushanbe Workshop was notable for participation of diplomats from three **states not yet party to the Mine Ban Treaty: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan**. In particular the delegate from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, contributed to the discussion on universalization by expressing support for the goals of the Mine Ban Treaty and hopes of Kyrgyzstan joining in the future. The other two states not yet party did not make any interventions, and the representative of Uzbekistan left after the opening session. On a number of occasions during the workshop, the ICBL called on these three states remaining outside the treaty to join as soon as possible and to undertake

interim steps towards full accession, including participation in Mine Ban Treaty meetings, disclosure of information on and destruction of existing stockpiles, as well as voting in support of the annual UN General Assembly Resolution on the treaty, among others.

The workshop's final session focused on the upcoming **Second Review Conference**. The ICBL shared its expectations vis-à-vis governments for the conference, including high-level participation, recommitment to the treaty and to a mine-free world, and concrete steps taken in the lead up to and pledges made at the conference.

A **parallel meeting on victim assistance** was held during most of the workshop with representatives of the governments of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, rehabilitation centers, the ICRC, ICBL, non-governmental service providers, and other victim assistance experts, including several landmine survivors. The aim was to discuss and examine the progress made and main challenges, as well as the way forward to overcome them and more effectively address the needs of landmine survivors in the region. The official delegation of Afghanistan and Tajikistan discussed future closer bilateral cooperation in the field of victim assistance. Campaigners from both countries agreed to develop a disability network between Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Iran in the near future. The ICBL representatives contributed with their concerns and recommendations to improve victim assistance in the lead up to the Second Review Conference and beyond.

On the second day of the workshop, participants split into two groups to undertake **field trips**. The victim assistance group visited the National Orthopaedic Center, while others visited a Mine Detection Dog Training Center several km out of Dushanbe for demonstrations in manual mine clearance and the use of dogs. Tajikistan was keen to use the demining visit to attract more donor interest in its mine action program.

Throughout the workshop, ICBL representatives engaged with governments to also promote the signature and ratification of the **Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM)**. So far only Afghanistan has signed the CCM in the region. Kyrgyzstan adopted the text of the CCM in Dublin, but has not signed the Convention yet. Both Afghanistan and Tajikistan have been affected by cluster munitions. In addition, on 9 July, after the workshop, campaigners from Tajikistan and Afghanistan together with the Head of the Tajikistan Mine Action Center held a joint advocacy meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan to encourage Tajikistan to join the Convention without delay.

The ICBL together with the Tajikistan Campaign issued a media advisory and a press release in English, Russian and Tajik, which secured good media interest including with the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and the Tajikistan National Radio Network.