

22/11/07 AM

SOUTH AFRICA:
Co-operation and Assistance

Mr President,

Thank you for the opportunity to be able to raise my delegation's views on the issue of "co-operation and assistance". I do so in the context of both the agenda item in question and that of our informal discussion two days ago when considering the issue of, "Ensuring a sustainability of resources to implement Article 5 of the MBT".

One issue that has crept into our debates over recent years is that of attempts to link mine action assistance directly to development issues, the so-called "mainstreaming" debate, or as some may perceive, that of imposing certain qualifications on the receipt of co-operation and assistance on affected States Parties to the Convention. In this context, the rest of us realised why this was happening, i.e. in order to prepare us for the impending entry into force of the new EC financial instruments for external assistance. A number of potential co-operating partners have seemingly followed suit and adopted the EC approach. Contrary to what some delegations, notably some of those in a position to render assistance, believe, there is far from blanket support for the need to mainstream mine action into development programmes.

Some States in a position to render co-operation and assistance have argued that a buy-in to this notion by mine-affected States Parties will further focus and invigorate donor assistance. This is debatable. Should a State Party wishing to receive co-operation and assistance under this prerequisite of having to mainstream such mine action assistance requests into its broader development programmes, this to our mind, has two very practical implications for affected States Parties. Firstly, as our delegation stated two days ago, this raises the question of what has happened to the dedicated budget allocations that potential co-operating partners had allocated in the past, and; secondly, would this mean that affected States would need to fund their mine action programmes from their overall official development aid package from which they had previously had to allocate funds for their national social spending issues such as health, education, housing and the like?

At this point, allow my delegation to emphasise one thing; placing conditionalities on international assistance and co-operation is a principled issue that has in the past consistently been flagged by States that are Members of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr President,

During my delegation's informal discussions outside of this hall two afternoons ago on this very issue of mainstreaming with one of its main proponents, a State Party that is considered to be a prominent donor, we raised this issue of "conditionalities" being placed for assistance by certain States in a position to render assistance. We were told that these were not conditionalities, but that those States that could demonstrate that mine action was part of their overall development plans and programmes would receive

assistance. When questioned what about those that wouldn't, the response was that, "No, they wouldn't." To our mind, quite an admission about the implications of mainstreaming for those States that may not have, due to capacity or other constraints, been able to draft such overall development plans and programmes.

In this vein it may be recalled that the ICBL, supported by my delegation, two days ago raised the very important issue of national ownership if we were to succeed in our mine clearance and survivor assistance efforts. It would be a shame if funds were to be allocated to an affected State Party that has submitted an elaborate development plan, but where the main beneficiary is a middle man who had crafted the plan so as to derive maximum benefit for itself. This is why the EU statement of 18 November 2007 that mainstreaming was "to better respond to national priorities and to enhance local ownership" is a deduction that we find to be tenuous at best.

But let us take this mainstreaming debate one step further and look at Art 6 of the MBT on "International co-operation and assistance". The second sentence of Article 6.2 states that, "The States Parties shall not impose undue restrictions on the provision of mine clearance equipment and related technological information for humanitarian purposes." When one looks at the term, "undue", this is said according to our Thesaurus to mean "excessive", "unnecessary" or "unjustified". The question now is this: Should a State Party be denied receiving such mine clearance equipment on the basis that its request did not include proof of having been mainstreamed into its development activities? Or the converse would be: Could the imposition of such a restriction or condition by any State Party on another not be considered to be a contravention of or non-compliance with Article 6.2? Just some food for thought.

What has been done is done, at the EC level at least. We do, however, question the value that could be added by the continued consideration of the issue of mine action and development in the context of our informal Treaty consultations. If the aim is to obtain an agreement that all mine action efforts should be incorporated into development programmes in a multilateral setting such as this, it is a direction to which we would not lend our active support. Mine action is far too diverse and often requires innovative and flexible or multifaceted approaches, given the fact that our required responses range from disarmament, peace and security, confidence-building measures between and amongst States; to health, education and social issues and ultimately to economic development issues. It is not a one-size-fits-all formula.

Whatever the outcome of our future deliberations, we have cautioned against the notion of mainstreaming before. From our point of view, mainstreaming mine action into development serves a few rather parochial interests. It takes us away not only from the spirit and the provisions of the Mine Ban Treaty, but away from our overall humanitarian objectives by attempting to impose upon the broader multilateral community that which could easily be resolved through the inclusion of mainstreaming provisions in bilateral co-operative agreements on mine action.

I thank you, Mr President.