

ICBL Statement on the Intersessional Work Program Review
Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings
25 June 2010

The ICBL strongly believes that the intersessional work programme is fundamental to the success of the Mine Ban Treaty. It ensures that work is done on the treaty throughout the year and that States Parties' progress and challenges are monitored and addressed on a regular basis. The system of standing committees, co-chairs and co-rapporteurs has also fostered responsibility for treaty implementation on the part of a broad range of states. The system of appointing a pair of states – one affected and another often, but not always, a donor – is a good system to ensure different perspectives in the work of the Standing Committees and to avoid putting the burden on one state alone.

We would just like to make a few observations and suggestions aimed at enhancing this system, so that it can continue to serve as a model for other international instruments.

Over the years, the co-chairs/co-rapporteurs have shown enormously varying interest in their leadership position, with progress on the thematic areas in a given year varying accordingly, although the strong support of the ISU has helped to fill these gaps and ensure that the work of their standing committee is carried out. Looking at it from a positive point of view, the standing committee system works best when co-chairs take new initiatives, proactively promote the work of their standing committee and otherwise exercise leadership needed to push forward the work of the treaty throughout the year. In our view, co-chairs should be selected for leadership positions based primarily on their willingness to take on such a role.

In terms of promoting engagement throughout the year, it might be useful to have small meetings of Standing Committees in Geneva apart from the ISC meetings as needed to address key issues. This would not mean meetings of all States Parties reporting on progress, but just those states particularly interested in specific issues getting together informally – like has been done in the past on land release, stockpile destruction and recently on international cooperation and assistance.

Another important element of the success of the intersessional work program has been the Coordinating Committee, which allows states in leadership positions and representatives of the ISU, ICBL, ICRC and UN to exchange information and ideas, as well as to plan for meetings of the MBT. On the other hand, we feel the Coordinating Committee could do more to promote the discussion of key challenges facing the treaty, or even thematic issues of interest to a large number of States Parties. We think that co-chairs/co-rapporteurs should not just see themselves as administrators of work on their Standing Committee, but also as a group of leaders collectively responsible for the well-being of the convention.

The ISC meetings are extremely valuable for the implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty. By asking States Parties to report on plans, progress, problems and priorities, those responsible for such reports (usually in the MFA) need to ensure such work is ongoing and inform themselves about developments.

The need to report can also serve as an impetus for faster progress. States also need such information to assess requirements for international assistance and progress on past aid allocated. It is also critical for those monitoring implementation to hear about details about states' activities, progress and challenges. The ISC meetings provide an excellent opportunity for the key actors in governments, civil society, the UN, etc. to have side meetings, which in turn helps further the aims of the convention.

On the other hand, the ISC meetings have become more and more formal, with delegations arriving with prepared statements but not always prepared to engage in more in-depth discussions about their reports or other matters of interest to the treaty. In this context we'd like to take up the ICRC's food for thought paper. We support the idea of having more in-depth, informal discussions with individual states on their progress and remaining challenges in a proactive and constructive manner, although we would like to see it not just on VA, but also on clearance and SD. We support the idea of holding such meetings with a few states as a trial run during the week of intersessional meetings next year to see if all stakeholders find it useful and then evaluating how to take the idea further. Like the ICRC, we see the goal of such meetings as offering an opportunity to advance implementation by exchanging views from different perspectives (such as government, civil society, donor, co-chairs), discussing challenges, and most of all, brainstorming about the best way forward. This may require a rethinking of the ISC meeting agenda, but in the initial stages, such meetings could simply be held on the sidelines.

Overall, we believe that we need to bring back the flexibility that used to be the hallmark of the Mine Ban Treaty, in terms of the work of the co-chairs and Standing Committee meetings, but also in terms of the overall structure. We do not think we need to attach monumental importance to a decision to create or disband a standing committee. Times will change, states' needs will change, and there is no reason that the committees established to meet those needs can't change as well. This applies to the proposal for a new SC on Resources or other possible reworkings of the Standing Committees.

We will also need to think in open and flexible terms about how to have meetings on cross-cutting issues with SPs from other conventions, like the Convention on Cluster Munitions. One idea to begin with is to encourage co-chairs to meet regularly with friends or coordinators in related treaties to exchange ideas and information. But we should also think about how to have meetings of states working on the implementation of related conventions on issues of joint interest.

These are just some broad ideas, but we would welcome an opportunity to talk about them in more detail with interested states and other parties to develop them further before this topic is addressed at the 10MSP.

Thank you.