

Statement on Mine Clearance [and Risk Education]

5th Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty, Siem Reap, Cambodia 25-29 November 2024

Thank you, Mr President,

The ultimate success of this treaty's core objective "*to put an end to the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines*" depends on the achievement of two goals: ending the use of these horrific weapons and clearing those already in the ground. We have made considerable progress in land clearance in many countries, including Cambodia, with some 30 States Parties completing their Article 5 obligations to date. We were also encouraged to hear yesterday that another State Party, Oman, is on track to meet its clearance deadline of February 2025.

However, Landmine Monitor data shows that for too many States Parties, completion of clearance is still a distant goal, with many of them making limited annual progress. *A central objective of this Review Conference must be to dramatically change this situation, over the next five years, both to protect the safety of communities and bolster the credibility of the treaty.*

This Conference is mandated to review progress and use this assessment to soberly address certain uncomfortable facts:

First, despite the 2025 aspirational goal of completion set by the 2014 Review Conference the rate of Article 5 completion has slowed significantly, with only 4 States declaring completion in the past 10 years as compared to the 22 that declared completion between 2004 and 2014.

Second, of the 33 States Parties with clearance obligations very few appear to be able to meet their current deadlines. Perhaps most alarmingly, as many as 2/3rds of States with clearance obligations continue, year after year, to report no clearance or clearance of less than 1km².

Third, experts participating in the review of this year's extension requests have noted that many countries requesting extensions in 2024 could technically complete clearance in 1 to 2 years, although most countries are asking for deadline extensions of 5 years.

Finally, we must recognize that a record of up to fourteen extension requests are expected in 2025, on top of the 8 presented this year. The extension provision, intended for only the most heavily contaminated states, has led to dozens of years of extensions since they began, to continuing risk to communities and to approximately 25,000 casualties reported in States Parties during extension periods.

We fully recognize that there are a variety of valid reasons for delayed clearances. Yet there are other factors States Parties should be able to exert greater influence over. Key among these are:

First, lack of national ownership of affected states or political will to prioritize clearance seem to be main roadblocks on the way to swift completion in too many countries, including my own – Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today is exactly 30 years since the landmine tore my body apart and traumatized me and my family for the rest of my life. It is very difficult to still have patience while waiting for the day my country becomes free of mines.

Second, there should be more political leadership on clearing sensitive areas at international borders or around military installations, which remains a concern in many countries.

Third, inadequate international funding to support completion by all affected States Parties in need.

And finally, an extension request process that has become routine and permissive.

These trends can and must be addressed by this Review Conference, and we are encouraged that the Siem Reap-Angkor Action Plan does tackle some of them.

However, we believe that far more is needed to adequately address this central challenge to the success of the convention. The ICBL urges this Review Conference and next year's committees to take additional steps including:

First, **amending Action#23 of the Action Plan** to make clear that strong work plans for clearance and risk education are indispensable to properly consider extension requests, and to recommend only one year extensions for those requests without strong plans.

Second, the establishment of an **informal Article 5 support group** of interested donors, expert civil society and other relevant stakeholders to support the Article 5 and Article 6 Committees and link in-country actors with global decision-makers.

Third, appointment of a **High-Level Envoy on Article 5** to promote greater national prioritization of clearance at the highest governmental levels.

Fourth, **more pro-active efforts to connect clearance and funding obligations so that ALL countries with clearly presented needs can access funding**. To this point, we were happy to see the recent amendment of **Action 44** to call for a decision on a voluntary trust fund within one year, rather than two. Completion as soon as possible remains an urgent need and all means that can support it should be put in place swiftly.

Finally, with ongoing delays and casualties, we believe that mine risk education must receive far more attention in the coming five years and welcome the proposal to make it a stand-alone agenda item at treaty meetings, with a **dedicated focal point** within the Committee on Art. 5 Implementation to oversee adequate follow-up.

Thank you.