



Dushanbe workshop on achieving a mine free central Asia

High Level Opening Session

07 July. 2009

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The ICBL's delegation from Geneva, Moscow, Dushanbe, and Kabul are pleased to attend the Dushanbe Workshop on Progress and Challenges in Achieving a Mine-Free Central Asia. Thanks to Republic of Tajikistan for hosting this Workshop and European Commission for its financial supports.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is a global network in over 70 countries that works for a world free of antipersonnel landmines, and advocates for the protection of the rights of landmine survivors and their families and communities. The ICBL was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its efforts to bring about the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. Since then, we have been advocating for the words of the treaty to become a reality, demonstrating on a daily basis that civil society has the power to change the world. As a member of the Cluster Munition Coalition, the ICBL is engaged in the global effort to ban cluster munitions and to address their humanitarian impact.

14 years ago when I stepped on an anti-personal mine in Parwan province of Afghanistan, it took me 7 hours to reach the first aid clinic and 13 hours to get to the hospital, and I lost much of my blood during the first 7 hours before reaching the first aid clinic. It took me such long time to get emergency aid because there was neither first aid nor a hospital close to the village where the accident happened. There no ambulance either. I was transported all the way by a big truck of one of my relatives. I was operated on 7 times due to unqualified doctors performing the amputation and inadequate medicine. No psychological or peer support was provided to me while the anxiety, disappointment, anger, frustration, helplessness, hopelessness, and depression had seriously traumatized me and badly affected my personal, family and social life in the first years after accident. But indeed I was lucky enough to survivor the hardships, which has not been the case for thousands of other victims in this region and around the world. Day after day, the traumas I went through are re-lived by other innocent people who – with a single step in their normal day's routine – have had their lives torn apart by landmines. We are all here today because we care deeply about making sure this terrible story stops.

Indeed, thanks to the tireless efforts of campaigners, the ICRC, States Parties implementing the Mine Ban Treaty, and most of all the de-miners that even sacrifice their lives and limbs to protect others, today many people in affected countries like Afghanistan and Tajikistan are enjoying

living without fear of stepping on a landmine. I personally admire everyone involved in this vital effort.

The eagerness and willingness of civil society organizations including campaigners to fight against landmines in over 70 countries and attending the Mine Ban Treaty's meetings including the regional workshops with enthusiasm, is a clear sign of a strong and ongoing commitment to get rid of these inhumane weapons and to ensure the rights of survivors are protected. At the same time, we need such energy to carry us forward on the long road to world free of landmines.

There are huge challenges ahead to be dealt with. For example after a decade of the Mine Ban Treaty coming into force, still tens of civilians are killed or become disabled by landmines every month in Afghanistan. The sixty thousand landmine survivors in Afghanistan and hundreds of landmine survivors in Tajikistan and other countries in the region are still facing tremendous challenges in their daily lives. The survivors that are living far from the capital and big cities remain deprived of their basic rights, they have no access to the existing services and they suffer from trauma, poverty and isolation in their everyday lives. Women with disabilities face double discrimination and are often denied access to basic services. They are being discriminated against when trying to get a job or to go to school and they remain among the poorest groups.

Tajikistan has requested almost 10 years more to clear its landmines and Afghanistan still has a long way to go. Both countries should give more national funds, but we also call on donor states to step up and increase contributions to mine action in the region. Tajikistan especially has suffered from a lack of support in the past.

Despite of all the challenges and the long and crucial journey ahead of us, we have to acknowledge that 10 years of the Mine Ban Treaty have made a difference in the lives of individuals and communities that live in areas affected by landmines. During the last 10 years, the amount of countries that have joined the Treaty has increased from 40 to 156. States Parties have cleared wide areas and have returned the land to productive use, people are being educated about the risks posed by landmines and other unexploded ordnance and tens of millions of stockpiled landmines have been destroyed, assuring that they never take away the lives and limbs of civilians anymore.

The ICBL believes that the lessons that we all have learned along the way allow us to affirm with deep conviction that achieving a mine free world is a Mission Possible. We will pursue this objective until it is accomplished. We call on States Parties and others to join us in expressing optimism that it IS possible to clear all the landmines, destroy all stocked mines, and effectively and efficiently address the needs of survivors and their families. The first step to putting these commitments into practice is for affected States Parties to have concrete plans, supported by adequate financial and technical resources available. However this is not possible in many affected countries without long-term and sustained international cooperation and assistance.

The ICBL urges Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to sign and ratify the Mine Ban Treaty as soon as possible without further delay and by doing so to make a Central Asia free of landmines.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions that was adopted in December 2008 in Oslo bans all the cluster munitions that harm civilians and protects the rights of cluster munitions victims. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that entered into force in May 2008 provides an overarching framework in providing assistance to people with disabilities. The ICBL calls on the Central Asian countries to adhere to both conventions as soon as possible.

In conclusion, the ICBL calls on all States in Central Asia to actively participate the historic event of Mine Ban Treaty Second Review Conference in November 2009 in Cartagena, including landmine survivors as part of official delegation. The road ahead may still be long, but with the lessons learned and with the ongoing momentum and enthusiasms we strongly believe achieving this goal is “Mission Possible”.

Thank you