

Introduction to the Stockpile Destruction Session, 2 December 2009

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The requirement for destruction of all stockpiles of antipersonnel mines, and the firm, relatively short deadline with no possibility for extension, are remarkable provisions in the Mine Ban Treaty, and have been remarkably implemented. Not all disarmament-oriented instruments have such obligations. But, stockpile destruction is best thought of from a humanitarian perspective. It is preventive mine action. It has potentially saved millions of lives, as a mine never laid can never claim a victim. It has also potentially saved millions of dollars, as it is much less costly to destroy a mine than it is to clear it, or to care for its victim. Over the years, States Parties have put a great deal of effort into emphasizing the importance of meeting the stockpile destruction deadline. They have done this both to save lives and to maintain the credibility of the Mine Ban Treaty. The Stockpile Destruction Standing Committee in particular has been used to build the political will to get the job done, to identify potential problems, and to find ways to overcome them.

In 1999, there was a wide divergence of views among States Parties about the difficulty and costs of destroying antipersonnel mines. But, with the exception of the special case of PFM mines, it is clear that these early concerns were misplaced. Technical and financial issues have not been overwhelming obstacles for the vast majority of States Parties. Relatively few States Parties have required significant outside assistance (which is fortunate in many ways, including the notable reluctance of most donor states to contribute to stockpile destruction, with the key exception of Canada).

There is no question that the key to timely and successful stockpile destruction is political will; the determination to get the job done, and prioritize it accordingly. In nearly every case where a country has missed its deadline or come close to missing it, the problem has been that the state simply started too late, both in planning and execution. The clear lesson of the Mine Ban Treaty experience is get started immediately, do not wait. States Parties have acknowledged, including through the Cartagena Action Plan, that new States Parties should have a plan for stockpile destruction in place in one year, and should begin physical destruction of mines within two years.

In fact, the record of compliance with stockpile destruction has been very good. Most states have finished far in advance of their deadlines, in many cases, years in advance. Of the 86 States Parties that have completed destruction, only four missed their deadlines, all of which finished relatively soon thereafter. Collectively, States Parties have destroyed more than 44 million stockpiled antipersonnel mines. We must congratulate Ethiopia and Kuwait as the most recent to complete destruction. There are still at least four States Parties that need to complete destruction, not counting Iraq which has expressed uncertainty about its stockpile status. Of the four, three missed their deadlines in March 2008 and have been in non-compliance ever since—Greece, Turkey, and Belarus. The fourth, Ukraine, has told States Parties it is likely to miss its deadline in June 2010.

These are the most serious confirmed cases of non-compliance with any of the Mine Ban Treaty's obligations in its history. The highest possible priority should be placed on bringing these three into compliance and avoiding a fourth case.

Two other stockpile related issues deserve mention. First, States Parties have, as reflected in both the Review document and the Action Plan, recognized the importance of timely reporting on and destruction of newly discovered stocks of antipersonnel mines. These could be mine caches that are found, or mines seized or captured from rebels, or mines turned in during disarmament processes. States Parties thus far do not have a good record of reporting on either the discovery or the destruction of such mines.

Second, a significant number of states retaining mines under the Article 3 exception have not provided any indications that the mines are being actively used for the permitted purposes of training and development, which gives rise to concerns that the mines are in essence stockpiled mines that should be destroyed. The Cartagena Action Plan addresses this matter, and States Parties should confront it in a vigorous and transparent manner.

In closing, let me reflect back to the early days of the Mine Ban Treaty. Especially in those early years, the Stockpile Destruction Standing Committee was a great example of the civil society-government partnership that has driven the Ottawa Process, and of the benefits of a somewhat informal approach to our work, sometimes pushing the boundaries of traditional diplomacy. There may be some in the room who remember that for the first few intersessional meetings, I served as an informal co-chair for the Standing Committee, sitting on the podium and helping to facilitate and guide discussions. We held Stockpile Destruction Film Festivals, jointly organized by the ICBL and governments, which became sometimes raucous affairs, but that built political will and determination. The ICBL still is given a special spot on the committee agenda to provide its global overview of the stockpile situation.

The benefits of partnership and a non-traditional approach to our work are also important lessons from the Mine Ban Treaty stockpile destruction experience-lessons that we should carry forward into the future. Thank you.