



Press Release GA/SPD/301

Fifty-ninth General Assembly
Fourth Committee
19th Meeting (AM)

FOURTH COMMITTEE, FAILING TO REACH AGREEMENT ON MINE ACTION RESOLUTION,

RECOMMENDS ASSEMBLY INCLUDE ITEM IN AGENDA OF SIXTIETH SESSION

Failing to reach consensus on a draft resolution for assistance in mine action, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) this morning approved a decision by which the General Assembly would defer the matter to its sixtieth session.

As the Committee concluded its debate on the topic prior to the action, Egypt's representative regretted the lack of consensus, but said it had resulted from a disagreement related to the essence of the role of the United Nations as enshrined in the Charter. That is, it concerned the responsibility of the Member States for developing policy and the responsibility of the Secretariat in implementing such policy, and not vice versa.

Another disagreement, he said, related to the manner in which the Ottawa Convention on mines was supported through the resolution. His country – severely affected by mines and unexploded ordinance left there during the Second World War – concurred with the humanitarian aspects of the Convention, but had entered numerous reservations, as the Convention ignored some security aspects, the binding responsibility for providing assistance and the rights of States in securing their boundaries.

Other non-signatories to the Convention, such as China and the United States, described their active participation in efforts to counter the humanitarian effects of land mines, and expressed hope that the disputes over the Convention would not hamper international cooperation on the issue.

Many other speakers, however, praised the Convention, urging those who had not yet acceded to it to do so. Canada's representative said that the Convention remained the definitive international framework for ensuring that the human tragedy caused by anti-personnel landmines was truly and permanently addressed. Applauding the work of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), as well as the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other agencies, she also stressed that the role of the Organization remained absolutely central in assuring its implementation.

The representative of Australia, realizing that many non-signatory countries had resource pressures and competing priorities, nevertheless called for universal accession and urged nations who had not yet signed on to commit themselves to ridding the world of anti-personnel mines.

Mine-affected countries described the toll taken by such weapons, as well as unexploded ordinance. The representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic said his country was the most heavily bombed nation in the world per capita. In the period 1964-1973, more than two million tons of ordinance had been dropped, of which 30 per cent did not detonate on impact. Since 1975, there had been more than 11,000 casualties. For developing countries in particular, landmines and unexploded ordinance constituted a major hindrance to socio-economic development.

That representative, along with that of Croatia, Angola and other mine-affected countries, described various degrees of country ownership and financial participation in mine action programmes, and thanked international organizations and donor countries for their support. Angola's representative stressed that mine clearance represented the *sine qua non* of preconditions for post-conflict reconstruction and development.

At the conclusion of the debate, Martin Barber, Director of the Mine Action Service, expressed appreciation for delegates' recognition of improved coordination of mine action in the United Nations system, as well as the commitment expressed by mine-affected countries in terms of both ownership and financial contributions from their own budgets.

In addition, the representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Union, introduced the decision on mine action, expressing serious disappointment at the lack of consensus, which he said had occurred despite much progress on language.

Also this morning, the Committee agreed on changes to a text related to public information, which it had previously postponed.

Also speaking this morning were the representatives of Pakistan, Ukraine, Yemen, New Zealand, Colombia and Ecuador.

A representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) also spoke.

The Fourth Committee will meet again at 2:30 p.m. on Monday, 1 November, to begin its general debate on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) this morning continued its consideration of "Assistance in mine action". For background information, see Press Release GA/SPD/300 of 28 October.

Statements

VLASTA BRKLJACIC (Croatia) said that her country had not only been active in mine action but also had the misfortune of experiencing the full scope of mine-related problems on its very soil. It had learned the importance of proper and timely mine action that dealt with such challenges, and acquired expertise in everything from technical demining to public awareness to rehabilitation of victims. She described the various programmes and public institutions that the country had developed in that regard, and said that Croatia had covered 85 per cent of the costs of its demining process, with the remainder coming from donors, whom she thanked.

She said Croatia stood ready to share its experience and expertise and help transform South-East Europe from seriously mine affected to mine free. She expressed satisfaction that all countries of the region were parties to the Ottawa Convention, and all took at least partial ownership of the Mine Action structures. To elicit stronger donor assistance in the effort, she encouraged the use of the matching-fund mechanisms of the International Trust Fund (ITF). Finally, she reiterated Croatia's invitation to the first meeting of the States Parties to the Convention following the 2004 Nairobi Review conference.

JIANG YINGFENG ([China](#)) said it was important to counter the humanitarian effect of land mines, even though China could not yet become a signatory to the Ottawa Convention because it had not been able to reconcile it with its defensive needs. It had furnished mine action assistance to many countries, as well as to relevant United Nations funds. The country had joined the Mine Action Support Group last year, and had participated in international workshops for cooperation exchange and other related international activities.

China, he said, was also looking to participate in the upcoming events related to the Ottawa Convention as an observer. Joint international mine action presented many opportunities for cooperation, when countries were able to put aside differences and work together. He looked forward to continue working on this noble humanitarian cause.

RIFAT JAVED KAHLOON ([Pakistan](#)) said the indiscriminate and irresponsible use of landmines had been the principal factor in the loss of innocent civilian lives, mostly women and children, during and after conflicts. Almost 40 per cent of Member States faced the problem of land mines in one form or another. In Afghanistan, people continued to grapple with the scourge of over 10 million landmines. Hundreds of Afghan mine victims were being treated in Pakistan and many had been provided with artificial limbs to rehabilitate their lives. Her country had also participated in demining operations in several affected countries, including Kuwait, Cambodia, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was party to the Amended Protocol II of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention.

While welcoming progress made on the issue, she said continued efforts were needed in the programme outreach of the United Nations Mine Action Service through electronic and print media to raise awareness of the problem. Participation of national authorities in mine-action programmes must also increase and training and equipment should be provided to that end. Modern demining technologies should be made available to affected countries. Moreover, demining operations should be supplemented with rehabilitation programmes, such as providing artificial limbs to mine victims and affording them job opportunities closer to their homes.

OLEH PAVLYSHYN ([Ukraine](#)) asked for enhanced consideration of the issue of providing additional technical and financial assistance, not only for mine clearance, but also for stockpiles destruction in countries where the presence of mines constituted an obstacle for post-conflict reconstruction and development. Effective decision-making processes should be put in place about short-, medium- and long-term priorities. The needs of mine-affected communities must set the basic parameters for assistance in mine action, including assistance to victims. The timely mobilization of resources from donors was essential to the success of relevant programmes.

He supported the universalization of the Ottawa Convention and the work relating to its Amended Protocol II, as well as to Protocol V of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. His country knew the problems and sufferings resulting from the uncontrolled use of mines as, despite the fact that the Second World War had ended more than half a century ago, tens of thousands of pieces of unexploded ordnance were neutralized every year. It had extensive experience in modern demining technologies and could train specialists within a short period of time. Ukrainian mine clearance engineers had operated in the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Sierra Leone and Lebanon.

ALOUNKEO KITTIKHOUN ([Lao People's Democratic Republic](#)) said his country was the most heavily bombed nation in the world per capita. In the period 1964-1973, more than 2 million tons of ordnance had been dropped, of which 30 per cent did not detonate on impact. With over 87,000 square kilometres, two-thirds of the country, having been contaminated, his country still continued to suffer from unexploded ordnance. Since 1975, there had been more than 11,000 casualties. Since the establishment in 1996 of the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme, over 35,000 hectares of land had been cleared.

He said his Government, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), was developing a ten-year strategic plan for clearance, risk education and victim assistance. It would take at least another 25 years to clear unexploded ordnance from priority agricultural and development sites. The Unexploded Ordnance Programme Trust Fund, supported and administered by the UNDP, continued to be the main channel for contributions to the Programme's work. He thanked those countries and groups who had made contributions or rendered assistance. For many countries, particularly developing countries, unexploded ordnance and landmines constituted major hindrances to socio-economic development.

SHANNON-MARIE SONI ([Canada](#)) said that the Ottawa Convention remained the definitive international framework for ensuring that the human tragedy caused by anti-personnel landmines was truly and permanently addressed. Applauding the work of the United Nations Mine Action Service, as well as the Department for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other agencies, she stressed that the role of the United Nations remained absolutely central.

Her country, she said, remained a leader in promoting the universalization and implementation of the Convention, with continuously increased funding. While eagerly anticipating the Nairobi Summit, she expressed disappointment that Member States were unable this year to agree on the text to be included in a resolution on assistance on mine action, and that the lack of consensus had resulted in the inability to establish "International Mine Awareness Day".

ROD SAWFORD ([Australia](#)) said that universalization of the Ottawa Convention was a primary goal for his country. Realizing that many non-signatory countries had resource pressures and competing priorities, he nevertheless urged those nations to commit themselves to ridding the world of anti-personnel mines. He also expressed disappointment that consensus was not reached on the recent draft mine action resolution. In his region, he welcomed the accession of East Timor to the Convention, as well as its ratification by Papua New Guinea, and looked forward to the Nairobi Summit.

He said that his Government would fully meet its pledge of \$100 million for mine action activities for the decade 1996-2005. Australia's mine action assistance had focussed on building indigenous capacity for mine clearance, assisting mine victims and promoting mine awareness. The majority of Australia's humanitarian demining activity was focused on countries in the Asia-Pacific region, many of which suffered the highest burden of mines and unexploded ordnance in the world. Australia would continue to seek a comprehensive solution to the problem of mines and continue to promote awareness and support activities that addressed victims' needs.

ALAA ISSA ([Egypt](#)) said his country had more than 280 hectares of land contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance, planted by countries that had been fighting during the Second World War and which had left without clearing them. Those mines had killed more than 8,000 people, mostly women and children. A 1991 national plan for mine clearance entailed a technical and financial burden, which, as Egypt had not participated in the planting of those mines, should be borne by those countries that were part of the battles in Egypt. It was regrettable that the bulk of resources available at the international level had conditionalities linked to specific treaties, including the Ottawa Convention. The available resources to States that did not accept the conditionalities were meagre. The parties responsible for the mines and unexploded ordnance had the responsibility for clearance.

He said his country concurred with the humanitarian aspects of the Convention, but had entered numerous reservations, as the Convention ignored some security aspects, the binding responsibility for providing assistance and the rights of States in securing their boundaries. He regretted that consensus had not been achieved on a draft resolution. The differences vis-à-vis the draft were so deep that consensus failed. Disagreement on the ongoing review of the United Nations policy on mine action, as well as the development of an action strategy for 2006-2007, related to the essence of United Nations work enshrined in the Charter, namely the responsibility of the Member States for developing policy and the responsibility of the Secretariat in implementing such policy, and not vice

versa. Another disagreement related to the fact that that resolution should be adopted by all Member States, parties and non-parties to the Convention.

ABDUL HAMID MASSOUR (Yemen) said human losses and disabilities as a result of mines had burdened many countries, including his own. A specialized Yemeni National Committee, set up in cooperation with the UNDP and friendly countries, had cleared more than 26,000 mines and also provided medical and social assistance to mine victims. Cooperation by the international community would help in that regard.

SELWYN HEATON (New Zealand) said mine action assistance was a very important part of peacekeeping and peace-building in order to achieve sustainable development. Improved integration and coordination in mine action should incorporate a development perspective, so that benefits would be sustained and meet the needs of the affected communities. The Ottawa Convention continued to be a successful and constructive forum for mine action. He called on those States outside the Ottawa Convention to respect the now firmly established norm against the use of anti-personnel mines and to join the Convention without delay.

He said his country continued to strongly support work underway in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and welcomed Protocol V, which recognized that parties to a conflict had an obligation to take responsibility for the munitions they had deployed. He expressed disappointment that consensus on a draft resolution had not been achieved. If the objective was to make the world a safer place free of mines, it was critical that the collective efforts of the United Nations, governments and civil society was well-harnessed, constructive and effective in addressing mine action goals.

SUSAN MOORE (United States) said that her country recognized the importance of mine action and therefore had been the world's leading donor for mine action over the past decade, pursuing the eradication of persistent landmines and explosive remnants of war wherever they threatened civilian populations or denied them access to land, homes, markets, schools and hospitals. Much progress had been made in that effort, as well as in assisting accident survivors with rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The United States would continue to assist those countries deserving its aid in the fight against such humanitarian threats.

Her country, she said, had worked hard to overcome differences pertaining to conventions and treaties in order to continue sending the message that humanitarian mine action was important and necessary. That message was, unfortunately, muffled this year. Otherwise, in relation to United Nations mine action agencies, there had been increased cooperation, coordination and transparency between the United Nations, Member States and relevant organizations. Member States, she said, must be mindful of that progress so as not to trample their efforts with needless requirements in the future.

MARÍA ANGELA HOLGUÍN (Colombia) said that Colombia had become a State Party to the Ottawa Convention and had destroyed 20,000 mines, and otherwise complied with its commitments. That progress could only have been made with the cooperation of international organizations and donor countries.

She said that there had been hundreds of civilian victims of mines planted by terrorists in her country, and it was essential to eradicate the devices. Organized crime did not care about the cruel results of anti-personnel mines and continued to plant them, and their devastating effects were well known. She expressed thanks to all countries that had assisted her country in the struggle, and she supported an International Day for mine action, as well as the universalization of the Ottawa Convention. She finally urged the international community to assure the fulfilment of that Convention's goals.

EDUARDO CALDERÓN (Ecuador) welcomed the emerging consensus in promoting the development of anti-mine activities and support for mine action in budgets for development. He was disappointed that, for the first time, no consensus had been achieved on a draft resolution regarding assistance in mine action, and that the draft, which contained a vision that had been promoted during a regional conference in Latin America, had to be postponed. He said demining was not just a disarmament problem, but had consequences for sustainable development. Mine removal needed to be followed up by projects to develop affected lands.

He said that Peru and Ecuador were the only two countries in the region that had undertaken joint programmes to clear mines along their common border, with assistance from the international community and the Organization of American States. Thus, confidence-building measures, complying with the Ottawa Convention, and cooperation had helped recover land for development purposes. He urged the donor community to cooperate in a timely manner with the efforts of developing countries to resolve their problems regarding mines and unexploded ordnance. Ecuador had destroyed all its anti-personnel mines. He appealed to all States that had not done so to accede to the Ottawa Convention.

ISMAEL GASPAS MARTINS (Angola) said that mine clearance was a top priority in his country, as it was the sine qua non condition for post-conflict reconstruction. There were more than 7 million land mines still in its soil. In that context, he described the new Government structures that would oversee mine removal activities in Angola. He also proposed a forum to encourage partnership in mine action efforts, and said that funding should be increased for such efforts.

Since it was a precondition for development, mine action should not be considered a merely humanitarian activity, and it should be integrated with development activities. He hoped that today's discussion would contribute to the Nairobi Summit and its objectives.

SAYE SAYED AQA, Team Leader, Mine Action, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), thanked those Member States who had emphasized that mine-affected States had to be at the centre of a solution to the problem of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, and that mine action was a development issue.

He said the UNDP was currently assisting 27 mine-affected States to develop sustainable mine action capacities, providing services that included technical support, assistance in establishing mine action centres, and management training. The UNDP had also established an exchange programme, in the context of South-South cooperation, for experts to share experiences and promote best practices. Assistance was also provided relating to mine action legislation, including assistance in helping meeting treaty obligations.

He informed the Committee that, as mine action was a development issue, the World Bank had decided to include mine action in the planning of development activities. He urged mine-affected States to include mine action in their development programmes and budgets.

In partnership with donor countries and mine-affected States, the UNDP had developed the Completion Initiative, geared towards demining activities in those countries where the problem could be addressed in a short period of time with limited resources.

MARTIN BARBER, Director of the Mine Action Service, responded to the delegates' statements over the course of the debate. He appreciated the recognition of improved coordination of mine action in the United Nations system, as well as the commitment expressed by mine-affected countries in terms of both ownership and financial contributions from their own budgets. He also appreciated the declaration of some non-signatories to the Ottawa Convention of their commitment to its humanitarian goals and their intention to explore joining the treaty in the future.

He expected to see an increasing focus on victim assistance as mine clearance programmes achieved progress and the number of victims continued to grow. He noted the statements made by speakers that called mine action important as a confidence-building measure and a precondition for development, and that called for more resources to be devoted to the effort. He said he would continue to share relevant documents with delegates concerning the plans of the Mine Action Service for the years ahead.

Mr. ISSA (Egypt) said Mr. Barber's comments were in no way a mandate for future work. Such a mandate could only come from the Committee.

The Committee then turned its attention to a draft decision, contained in document A/C.4/59/L.9, by which the General Assembly would decide to include in the provisional agenda of its sixtieth session the item entitled "Assistance in mine action".

Introducing the draft decision, GEORGE PIETER CALLENBACH (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, expressed sincere disappointment that, as facilitator, he had not been able to foster consensus, even though good progress had been made on many elements. Certain delegations had objected to some language and even a proposal to delete that language had not been acceptable. Therefore, it had been decided that a text that would defer the decision to the next year would be introduced.

The Committee was then informed that adoption of the draft decision would have no budget implications.

In general comments before the vote, Mr. ISSA (Egypt) reiterated his regret that the Committee could not approve this year's draft resolution on assistance in mine action. He said the divergence of views ran so deep that a consensus was impossible. The core of the disagreement related to the methodology of work of the Organization, in accordance with the Charter. Member States were responsible for making policy; the Secretariat was responsible for implementation of policy, not vice versa.

The Committee then recommended, without a vote, that the Assembly adopt the draft decision.

Decision on Information Text

The Committee then took up "Programme 23, Public Information" (document A/59/6), which it had previously postponed. KAIS KABTANI, Committee Rapporteur, described the agreed changes in language that had been made to the text, which were detailed in an annex to that document.

The Committee agreed that it would inform the President of the General Assembly that, in addition to the changes indicated in the draft resolution entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities" adopted by the Committee on 21 October, the Committee had decided to make further changes as indicated in the annex mentioned above.

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