

Meetings of the Standing Committees established by the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

Opening remarks – 23 April 2007

**Ambassador Stephan Nellen
Director of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining**

Dear Friends of the Ottawa Convention

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, which, since the Intersessional Programme was established in 1999, has played host to the meetings of the Standing Committees.

This is the third occasion for me as Director of the GICHD to welcome you.

I have observed in these three years a steady progression of efforts to advance the aims of the Convention.

My time as Director has coincided with the period when you, as States Parties, have been applying the Nairobi Action Plan, which you adopted on 3 December 2004.

The adoption of the Nairobi Action Plan created the expectation that significant progress would be made by the end of 2009 towards your ultimate aim – an aim the GICHD shares and promotes – of ending, for all people for all time, the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines.

Each year since the adoption of the Nairobi Action Plan I have witnessed – in these meetings and during my visits to many of your countries – impressive accomplishments in the application of the Nairobi Action Plan.

- I have seen additional States Parties – like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia last year – report the fulfillment of their Article 5 obligations, thus defying the critics who spuriously suggest that implementing Article 5 is not possible.
- I have seen – and through the ISU we have supported – the application of the strategic approach to victim assistance which you agreed to in Nairobi.
- And I have noticed the completion of stockpile destruction programmes.

While each year we can continue to account for further progress, I would remark that each year the challenges appear to be more profound.

As State Parties and as organizations remain fully supportive of the States Parties' aims, collectively we face pressing challenges such as:

- the need to more rapidly release areas suspected of being dangerous,

- the imperative to act on victim assistance responsibilities in a way that respects the place of the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors in broader disability, human rights and development contexts; and,
- the importance of acting without delay to destroy stockpiles now held by such a small number of States Parties.

As I mentioned last year when I welcomed you, these meetings should be less about the words we say and more about the actions we undertake.

I will act accordingly by saying no more other than to share with you a few organizational necessities.

First: I wish to acknowledge and thank the European Commission for again providing interpretation services in English, French and Spanish and Canada for ensuring the same with respect to Russian. These are invaluable contributions to ensuring widespread participation in these meetings.

Second: Let us not forget the important contribution that Switzerland makes to these meetings. It is Switzerland's financial contribution to the GICHD which enables the GICHD to host and organize these meetings each year.

Finally: This week is about a lot of hard work but there is still time to socialize. In this regard, it is my pleasure to extend an invitation to all delegates to join me at a cocktail reception tomorrow evening at 6:00 p.m. at the Attique Restaurant on the 9th floor of this building.

I wish you all the best for a successful week.