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Update on Gender and Mine Action at the Intersessional Standing Committees Meeting, 5 June 2008

Thank you Mr/Mrs Co-chair,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines, I am very honoured to be here at this meeting today, and to have been asked to provide you with an update on gender and mine action.

The **relevance of gender mainstreaming in mine action** has taken time to impose itself clearly. Mine action belongs to a traditional “masculine”, technical sector, one of war and weapons, in which the relevance of gender might not appear clearly at first sight. Yet, the very fact that I have been invited today to present an update on the issue shows that things are changing. There are indeed significant gender dimensions to mine action, the core point being that women, men, girls and boys are differently affected by landmines and hence, best assisted in different ways.

I will illustrate this through four points here today.

My first argument is that the integration of a gender perspective in mine action **targets and benefits all members of society; women and girls as well as men and boys**. One good example on this is the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation in Jordan who gathered information from both women and men in the mine affected communities, by survey teams made up of both female and male surveyors. The results showed that women and men identified different areas as contaminated by landmines due to their different knowledge and experiences. This example illustrates that valuable information would have been left out if the surveying had only involved one of the groups. Consequently, the clearance could be carried out based on more accurate and reliable data.

Secondly, **gender mainstreaming implementation in mine action does not have to be complex or costly**. Gender, despite its alleged complexity, is universally applicable in mine action, regardless of pillar, region or culture; gender is doable by small means and with low cost implications. One example is the National Mine Action Centre in Sudan who developed MRE material ensuring that men, women, boys and girls recognised themselves in the pictures. This exercise was low cost and ensured that the material did not exclude any particular sex and reached out to all members of the communities. This illustrates how organisations are executing simple, but efficient and low cost gender mainstreaming activities, sometimes without labelling them as gender projects.

My third point is that **culture and traditions do not constitute the main obstacles to mainstreaming gender within mine action activities**. Culture and religion are frequently used as an argument for not integrating a gender focus in mine action activities, referring to the “unique situation” in a particular country. Yet, where empirical research has been conducted, the results support the opposite. A study made by the Swiss Campaign indicates

that lack of **resources, knowledge and willingness** constitute the real obstacles. In Sri Lanka, for example, NPA has successfully employed female deminers in an environment where other organisations stated that such operations would be “impossible”, and in Somaliland HALO Trust has carried out similar interventions. By addressing the recruitment process through a gender lens and challenging notions and ideas, these organisations found that the alleged obstacles in terms of culture and traditions actually weren't there.

My fourth and last point is that **gender mainstreaming is more than simply employing women**. Many organisations are confident that they have integrated a gender perspective by employing women. It is true that employment of, for example, female deminers is an excellent way of ensuring female participation in mine action. This is done in Laos, Cambodia, Lebanon, only to mention a few places, where these women act as role models and source of inspiration for other women. But often employing women in mine action has reinforced stereotypes, as women have been hired for work in administration, education or rehabilitation rather than as deminers, a role traditionally perceived as being for men. Gender balance is one part of gender equality, but not everything. For example, a gender mainstreamed victim assistance means more than having female nurses. It is also about meeting the different needs of female and male survivors, and their dependants, in an appropriate way.

In summary, gender is not only about **equality but also about quality**. The results and the impact of mine action activities will improve greatly by integrating a gender perspective, and by taking all people's need and concerns into consideration.

Before ending this presentation I would like to take the opportunity to bring attention to a report that the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines just recently launched - *“Gender and Landmines – From Concept to Practice*. This report - funded by the Swiss Government - is based on field research from five countries; Colombia, Lebanon, Mozambique, Sri Lanka and Sudan. The report is available outside the meeting hall or at our web portal for those interested. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the current donors, the governments of Norway and Canada, for their kind support to our programme.

I thank you for your attention.