

16 May 2003

**REPORT OF THE UNIVERSALIZATION CONTACT GROUP
TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE GENERAL STATUS AND
OPERATION OF THE CONVENTION**

Statement by the Chair of the Universalization Contact Group, Shannon Smith, Canada

As has been the tradition, the Universalization Contact Group met on the margins of the Standing Committees, Thursday at lunch.

The discussions built on the good news we have heard this week – from states which ratified the Convention recently, and those who reported the steps they have taken which place them closer to formal acceptance of the Convention to take place hopefully in the near future.

Many states and organizations committed to undertaking specific actions with states not party to the Convention, to be reported back to the Contact Group in Bangkok in September. With these commitments, we feel assured of continued momentum in the universalization of the Convention.

In addition I presented a new initiative to the Contact Group, which we believe is of general interest, and so will also report here.

Statement by General (Retired) Maurice Baril former Chief of the Defence Staff, Canada on Military to Military Dialogue.

Last Wednesday Canada hosted an informal meeting to discuss the issue of the importance of military to military dialogue in our effort to promote the Ottawa Convention. I have been asked to briefly inform you of the essence of our discussion.

Representatives from Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Thailand and Human Rights Watch participated in our discussion. General Guenther Greindl from Austria joined us for the meeting and subsequent discussion. Separate bi-lateral discussions with representatives of Indonesia and Sri Lanka were also held.

It was agreed that military to military dialogue is essential in countries where the military leadership are, or may be, leading the resistance to ratification of the Ottawa Convention. We believe senior retired military can be of assistance to the overall effort and we established a set of initial guidelines and principles for a team or network of retired military to support the universalization effort.

These guidelines include:

Participation of senior retired military should be sanctioned and supported by the Governments from which these people are drawn in order to facilitate coordination, administration, support from the national mine action directorates or teams, and to ensure national diplomatic protection in the conduct of this activity.

If a representative of a State Not Party to the Convention is willing to become involved ways must be found to utilize such a valuable resource.

Representatives should be very senior and/or very well connected. They should be recently retired from their own national service and have been involved on the international military scene such as with UN, PFP, NATO, EU, Union Africa and the OAS. Of course we need people who are convinced and personally committed to the Convention and are not just an appointment from their home Government.

Specific principles include:

The Ottawa Convention and AP mines are the only focus of this group.

We are a team available for support to the overall universalization efforts of active and engaged nations.

We are advisors to the diplomats who are leading the action.

We can and will help to approach and persuade specific targeted countries.

The team will not be structured to lead the universalization effort, but rather to support the activities of all of you who are the experts in international conventions.

In the immediate future we will establish and formally contact certain nations seeking their support for the initiative. The network will be established to exchange information and coordinate our efforts. It is intended to keep the operation simple but flexible and integrated into each of our various nations overall strategy.

As this is a universalization activity it is believed that the Universalization Contact Group is best suited to receive our input. The regular meetings of the Contact Group permit regular feedback; follow up discussion and any required coordination.

In summary we are putting a team together with members available to all in the effort to reach the very senior military leadership of Non State Parties. We have the language, we have the know how, we understand the issues and we are committed to advancing this Convention. In many instances we know personally these senior leaders. In our past careers we too have been responsible for our nation's security just as these leaders are now. We can discuss their concerns from a position of shared experience.

It must be emphasized that we are a supporting team and not the lead to this international universalization effort. But where our contacts, experience and military arguments are required, we can play an important role.