

**11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of States Parties to the Mine-Ban Convention**  
**Informal session, "Reflecting on two decades of efforts to end the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines" - Wednesday 30 November**

**Intervention by ICRC**  
**Mr. Jacques Stroun, Head of Regional Delegation, Bangkok**

In 1986, I worked as an ICRC doctor in El Salvador. One day, we were called to evacuate a 15 year-old girl, gravely wounded by an anti-personnel landmine in an area where there was fighting between the army and the guerrillas. It took us 3 days to secure the authorisation to fetch her and bring her to medical care. I remember her pale face, her leg torn apart and the horrible smell of rotting flesh.

Around the world, in countries affected by war, hundreds of my colleagues were witnessing, like me, the cruelty of landmines and their impact on civilians.

Confronted with more and more evidence, between 1989 and 1990, the ICRC conducted a **study of landmine injuries** in our hospitals on the Thai-Cambodian and Afghan-Pakistan borders. Using epidemiological methods, this study demonstrated the risks that civilians were exposed to by anti-personnel mines. It also revealed that landmine victims require far more surgical interventions, more blood transfusions and longer hospital stays than those injured by most other weapons - not to mention life-long prosthetic care.

This medical study was a turning point for the ICRC, as it raised serious questions about the possibility of using anti-personnel landmines in accordance with **fundamental rules of international humanitarian law (IHL)**, such as the obligation to protect civilians, the prohibition of indiscriminate weapons and the prevention of unnecessary suffering.

From 1993, the ICRC had a series of discussions with experts from the armed forces and the weapons industry to discuss the effectiveness and the impact of landmines and to share with them our concerns. One year later, in 1994, the ICRC President called for a total ban on anti-personnel landmines, joining a worldwide movement, which brought us here today.

In 1995, the ICRC commissioned a study by a renowned retired Canadian Brigadier to examine the actual use and effectiveness of anti-personnel mines over a period of 55 years. Entitled "**Anti-personnel Landmines: Friend or Foe**", the study concluded that "the limited military utility of anti-personnel mines was far outweighed by the appalling humanitarian consequences of their use in actual conflicts" and recommended the **prohibition and elimination** of these weapons. Fifty-five senior active and retired military officers from 19 countries endorsed this conclusion.

We have come a long way over the past 25 years, and we can be proud of the results. The number of people affected by landmines has dramatically fallen, thanks to the remarkable efforts of States, international organisations and civil society. But unfortunately, some of my young colleagues working in field hospitals around the world are still receiving and treating today young girls like the one I evacuated 25 years ago, who have legs blown off by landmines. And this will be the case until all countries have joined the Convention and cleared all of the landmines still in the ground.

I will end my contribution to this session by showing two of the ICRC's short, but powerful, TV advertisements, used in the mid-1990s around the world.