

**Fourth Meeting of the States party to the Convention on the
Prohibition on the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of
Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction**

**Statement by the
International Committee of the Red Cross**

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Geneva, 16 September 2002

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross, I wish to thank you for the opportunity you have given our organization to address this fourth meeting of the States Parties. You are aware of the importance that the ICRC attaches to the Convention, to respecting its provisions, and to protecting the lives of the victims of armed conflict, some of whom suffer the appalling effects of anti-personnel mines.

Last week in Oslo, a number of States, international organizations and representatives of civil society marked the fifth anniversary of the successful conclusion to negotiations that led to the Convention's adoption. Let us not forget, however, that prohibiting anti-personnel mines could rather be described as the easy part. Unless its provisions are applied and implemented in full at national level, the Convention cannot achieve the hoped-for results.

Our meeting here, five years after the diplomatic conference in Oslo, is an opportunity for us to review the results of our joint efforts. The ICRC has observed a drop in the number of victims in certain mine-affected countries. Lives are thus being saved and amputations avoided where the provisions of the Convention are being applied.

However, we still have a long way to go before anti-personnel mines can be eradicated definitively. There are still several million anti-personnel mines buried in the ground, and the number of victims awaiting appropriate care and the rehabilitation they need is still much too large. What is more, we must make sure that the stockpiles of anti-personnel mines are destroyed in order to prevent any more of these destructive devices from being laid.

Early next year will mark the end of the four-year period for certain States Parties to destroy their stockpiles of anti-personnel mines. The ICRC urges those States to take the measures needed to meet the deadline. There may be no exceptions to this term of four years; it is imperative that all the countries that have adhered to the Convention comply with it.

In addition to destroying stockpiles, the States Parties must take steps to clear mine-infested areas and must provide victims with the care they need for their rehabilitation and reintegration into social and economic life. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been assigned a special role in this field: the ICRC itself and many National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are actively involved in programmes of both preventive and remedial action. These mainly involve mine awareness and promoting compliance with humanitarian law. Our activities also include emergency aid, medical assistance and rehabilitation for mine victims. In 2001, for example, the ICRC supported over 40 limb-fitting and rehabilitation centres in 14 countries.

I would like to mention in this context the Special Fund for the Disabled, which the ICRC created in 1983. The Special Fund is now an independent body, whose mission is to ensure continuity of the ICRC's rehabilitation work in cooperation with local partners. It endeavours to guarantee amputees and other disabled persons long-term care whenever ICRC programmes come to an end after an armed conflict. Since its establishment, the Fund has supported 64 projects in 36 countries. In 2001,

some 50 rehabilitation centres and prosthetic workshops in 25 countries received support from the Fund.

An artificial limb does not last a lifetime. Indeed, a child's prosthesis has to be replaced every six months, and an adult's every three years. The question of long-term assistance therefore needs to be broached. It is important that mine victims receive life-long care. The Special Fund ensures this continuity and provides assistance in certain developing countries.

The ICRC also considers that particular attention must be devoted to certain types of mine whose fuses are so sensitive that the explosion can be triggered by the presence, proximity or contact of a person. The ICRC views as prohibited by the Convention *any* mine capable of being detonated by the presence, proximity or contact of a person. These mines are mainly devices with low-pressure fuses, tripwires, break-wires or tilt rods.

The ICRC observes that several States have taken steps to reduce the threat posed by these mines to civilians. Several of these measures were identified at the meeting of experts organized by the ICRC in March 2001. We hope that this issue will be resolved in its entirety through constructive dialogue.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The States Parties will be meeting in 2004 in the framework of the first Review Conference of the Convention. We must begin here and now to devote thought to what remains to be done before and at that Review Conference. By 2004 we must have made sure that the stockpiles of the States Parties whose four-year deadline expires have been completely destroyed and that mine-clearance work has progressed. The number of mine victims must also be reduced in all of the countries most affected by this scourge.

The ICRC encourages all of the States Parties to come to the Review Conference with specific plans for completing their mine-clearance work, for which the first deadline will arrive in 2009. Considerable funds will have to be made available to complete the work in time. This five-year period – from 2004 to 2009 – will be a crucial phase in ensuring that the Convention keeps the promises made to mine-affected countries and their people.

We must also pursue our efforts to ensure universal participation in the Convention. The ICRC therefore welcomes the fact that Angola and Afghanistan recently became party to it. The addition of these countries – which are among those worst affected by mines – as participants in the Convention will present a tremendous challenge in the years that lie ahead and will require unflinching commitment on the part of each and every one of us.

Unfortunately, these two countries know the effects of anti-personnel mines only too well. The problem in Afghanistan is so huge that it will take an estimated further 10 years for priority zones such as towns, villages, roads, irrigation systems and agricultural areas to be rid of mines. Given the fact that new minefields are discovered every year and that the recent conflict has further aggravated the problem, the ef-

fects of mines and unexploded ordnance will be felt for decades to come. In Angola, where the ICRC has been present for 30 years, anti-personnel mines continue to terrorize the civilian population; indeed, 20% of the victims are women.

Let us bear in mind that the success of the Convention will also depend on the results obtained in these highly mine-affected countries.

We call upon all the States Parties to fix priorities and devise specific plans for completing the work that remains to be done. We also call upon regional and international organizations as well as civil society to mobilize to ensure that the first Review Conference will be an occasion to celebrate our success. Our commitment to the Convention requires that we do so. Our duty to mine victims demands it.

Thank you.