

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

I am pleased to have the honour of addressing this Fourth Meeting of State Parties on behalf of the Finnish Government.

Let me first congratulate you, Mr. President, upon your election as President and I can assure you of the full support of the Finnish Delegation.

Finland fully subscribes to the views expressed by the Presidency of the European Union, Ambassador of Denmark, also on our behalf earlier this week. Let me just make a few additional comments.

Finland has attended all Meetings of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention as an observer and it has participated in the meetings of Intersessional Standing Committees on victim assistance, mine clearance, stockpile destruction and also at the general status and operation of the Treaty. We do find the intersessional work of the Ottawa Convention dynamic and vital.

The Ottawa Convention prohibiting the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines is clearly one of the major successes in the field of disarmament in recent years.

Even though Finland is not yet party to the Convention, it supports an effective and global ban on anti-personnel mines. Finland is participating in the work of the EU to promote the objectives and global implementation of the Ottawa Convention.

The Government of Finland stated last year in its security and defence policy report that the work is continuing with a view to Finland acceding to the Convention in 2006 and with the intention of destroying the APL's by the 2010, without compromising Finland's credible defence capability.

Accession to the Convention and examining alternatives to anti-personnel mines will be discussed in the report due in 2004 concerning the entire Finnish defence system.

Mr. President, I wish to underline the fact that Finland does not make or export anti-personnel mines. We have no anti-personnel mines deployed in the Finnish soil. During peacetime, anti-personnel mines are kept in Defence Forces stocks and will not be used.

Finland is making significant contributions in humanitarian mine action. We also work together with a great number of countries, including our EU partners, toward the achievement of a total elimination of anti-personnel mines worldwide.

Since 1991 the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has provided 32 million euros in humanitarian mine action assistance to 14 countries. Finnish aid for mine action operations has since 1998 amounted to some five million euros per year. This level will be maintained for the time being.

Mr. President,

In the spring of 1998, Finland established a standby mechanical mine clearance capacity to support UN demining operations. Finnish mechanical mine clearance teams, Finn Flail Teams (FFT), have subsequently demined a total area of almost two million square metres in Cambodia, Mozambique and Kosovo over the last four years. As is the case with all mechanized demining operations there have been successes and set backs also for us. All in all it was a worthwhile undertaking from which Cambodia, Mozambique and Kosovo benefited substantially in terms of area reduction and time save for manual teams. Due to the harsh working conditions and prolonged wear and tear our flails have now, for their part, fulfilled their tasks.

The main criteria of the Finnish humanitarian mine action is to assist countries which have the most human mine victims. Today two thirds of the Finnish mine action assistance is allocated to Afghanistan, Angola and Cambodia. The aid is channelled through UN mine action programmes and supported bilaterally by Finnish and international NGO's.

Thank you Mr. President