



***FIFTH MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION
OF THE USE, STOCKPILING, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF
ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION***

BANGKOK, 15 TO 19 SEPTEMBER 2003

**Declaration by Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga
President of the Geneva International Centre
for Humanitarian Demining**

I am glad to be back in Thailand today. It is very appropriate to have this meeting in one of the most mine affected regions of the world, where some countries can be proud of their impressive achievements, while others unfortunately still refrain from joining the Convention.

Let me particularly thank the Royal Thai government for being the host and for making such excellent preparations. You are admirably successful in creating the environment for a good outcome of this Meeting of the States Parties.

It is for the fifth time that we are gathering since the memorable conference in Ottawa, where the Convention was opened for signature. Even after all those years the Convention remains a historic and unique achievement.

The ban on antipersonnel mines has become more and more an international norm even for those who have not yet formally accepted its provisions. However, as the Geneva Centre has supported since its establishment over five years ago and as I have done in various capacities for over a decade, let us continue to demand that all States cease to use, produce or transfer anti-personnel mines. Likewise the use of such weapons by non-state actors cannot be tolerated by the international community. Let me in this connection commend the Geneva Call.

Many speakers have emphasized the successes of the Convention. While we should be proud of our efforts, we should not be merely retrospective. Too much human suffering remains, too much work still lies ahead and too many problems remain yet unresolved. Let me again commend the ratification of the Convention by Gambia, the Central African Republic, Cyprus, Sao Tomé e Príncipe, Lithuania, Timor Leste, Guyana and Belarus, which have occurred since our last meeting in Geneva.

Next year's Review Conference will bring us back to Africa, a heavily mine affected continent where the First Meeting of the States Parties took place. Our Nairobi conference must not be a routine examination on the functioning of articles and provisions, as we see it unfortunately so often under instruments of international law.

In my view the Conference should give clear messages to governments as well as to the broader public. The core message should be a renewed commitment for a world free of antipersonnel mines and for the solution to the problems those weapons have created. We should also strongly state what the achievements under the treaty were, but also where future work is necessary and where we might have failed in our efforts.

I will now point at topics of our Bangkok meeting that I find particularly important.

In his Action Program the President refers to the additional efforts that will be required to ensure that the Convention lives up to its humanitarian promise. I could not agree more with his statement. I therefore urge all States Parties and others who support their efforts to vigorously implement the elements of the President's Action Programme with a view to ensuring that the provisions of the Convention continue to be respected. And we must continue to endeavour to see this Convention serve as a meaningful framework for consultation and cooperation, particularly given that there is still a long way to go to address the problems faced by mine-affected populations.

To achieve this goal it is important to keep the unique and dynamic process alive that has emerged with the efforts to ban anti-personnel mines. In a unique way this process brings field practitioners, diplomats and a range of other people together. It ensures a motivating exchange of ideas and experience, but also continued attention from government and the broader public. There is for me no doubt that this process represents a unique asset.

A centre-piece of this unique process has been the Intersessional Work Programme. The Geneva Centre is proud that since the establishment of this programme in 1999 it has supported this unique and important effort. In the year leading to the First Review Conference you will no doubt discuss necessary adaptations to a post-Review Conference Intersessional Work Programme. As you proceed with these discussions, please know that we stand ready to continue to provide in the future the type of support that it has provided in the past. Moreover, the GICHD is happy to continue to enhance services to the States Parties through the Implementation Support Unit, the establishment of which by the Geneva Centre emanated from a mandate agreed to by you at your third annual meeting.

It is essential that mine action is a priority in humanitarian and development policies and that the necessary resources in support of the fulfilment of the aims of the Convention are generated. This is an important responsibility of both those States Parties in a position to provide assistance as well as mine-affected States Parties themselves.

The sheer magnitude of the challenges of clearing mined land implies that more effective and efficient methods are needed. In this regard, the GICHD is committed to continuing to create and share knowledge with, and to providing instruments and services to, the States Parties to the Convention and the broader mine action community.

I am pleased that during the past year, the Intersessional Work Programme has highlighted the undeniable fact that the responsibility to provide for the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine survivors rests with each individual affected State. More needs to be done within these States to listen to -- and respond to -- the views and needs of the victims. Certainly affected States

Parties which require assistance in fulfilling this obligation have a right to request assistance. In this regard, I would echo that sentiment expressed by the Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance -- that affected States Parties should make full use of the Intersessional Work Programme to communicate their problems, plans, progress and priorities for assistance in meeting the needs of their landmine survivors.

I hesitate almost to call for more local ownership and capacity building as this claim has become a routine formula in speeches. But the endeavour remains important. The recently launched discussion on the integration of mine action in major development activities is an important avenue to pursue. It will need changes in thinking and in behaviour for many institutions involved, including for non-governmental organizations. The experience of the United Nations can be very helpful in this regard.

Let me finally announce our latest publication, the Guide to Mine Action. The handbook is a reader with basic information for diplomats, field practitioners and others working in the Ottawa process. Such a book was missing, and it should particularly facilitate new people to join our common efforts. I wish you a good reading of the handbook.