

Statement of the Delegation of Canada to the Sixth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, Zagreb, Croatia, November 2005

Madame Chair,

I would like to begin by thanking you for the very warm hospitality offered by your Government and the people of Croatia in welcoming us to Zagreb this week. On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to pay tribute to the tremendous effort and dedication shown by the Government of Croatia, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and associated services, in making all the logistic and other arrangements for the Sixth Meeting of States Parties. It is truly a pleasure for us to be here. I am confident that, under your distinguished presidency, we will achieve all the goals we have set for the Meeting and wish to assure you of my delegation's steadfast support for you in this task.

By any standard, the Ottawa Convention is a remarkable achievement in the annals of international disarmament, humanitarian and development cooperation. Each year, as new countries become States Parties, we move closer to our collective goal of a mine-free world. Each year, the mine action community continues to grow and collectively we rid the world of more mines and provide assistance to victims. Canada remains committed to the vision and objectives of the Ottawa Convention, and our contribution to mine action includes dedicated resources, both financial and human, to realise this ambition.

Canada is pleased with the progress made over the past year following the successful conclusion of Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World last December. The Nairobi Action Plan has proven to be an excellent resource for States Parties in planning their respective mine action strategies. We are also delighted that many States Parties are using specific reference to the Nairobi Action Plan in their reporting. Continued use of the Action Plan as a roadmap for implementing the Ottawa Convention will be crucial if we are to gauge our success and mark our progress towards a mine-free world.

Canada is also pleased with the development of the Zagreb Progress Report and feels that it serves as an important tool for measuring the implementation of the Nairobi Action Plan. The Progress Report is an excellent way for States Parties to reflect upon the work accomplished during the past year while identifying challenges that lie ahead.

Support for the Convention, which now includes 147 states, continues to grow at a steady rate. Our success in advancing the Convention's core humanitarian objectives is clear. The number of states using or producing AP mines continues to decrease, global trade has essentially ceased, and stockpiles are being progressively eliminated by the millions. Considerable resources are being deployed to clear more valuable land and assist victims in a larger number of countries. Most importantly, casualty rates continue in an overall downward trend.

But clearly the job is far from complete. There are still some 200 million mines stockpiled globally; 13 states are listed as producers of these weapons; key military powers remain outside of the Convention; and 3 states acknowledged using AP mines last

year. The development of countless communities is restricted by mines that remain in the ground in over 80 countries, and between 15 and 20 thousand people still fall victim to these indiscriminate weapons every year.

So the urgent need to address this humanitarian imperative remains. As we seek new and innovative ways to promote a broader understanding and acceptance of international mine action norms, we must focus our attention on securing an ever-increasing, and ultimately universal, acceptance of our common goals.

Until quite recently, mine action has been regarded as almost exclusively a disarmament or post-conflict humanitarian issue. This has begun to change, and it is now increasingly accepted that, in many mine-affected developing nations, mine action is both a humanitarian imperative and a precondition for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

Daily, the millions of people living in mine-affected communities around the world take every step with hesitation, fearing it could be their last. Long after conflicts have ceased, the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continues to pose a terrible threat, often making it impossible for displaced people to return to their homes, and prolonging suffering in affected areas.

Madame Chair,

Canada strongly encourages mine-affected States Parties in the developing world to include mine action as a development priority in their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and all relevant Sector Strategies and urges the United Nations to include mine action in their Development Assistance Frameworks for mine-affected countries and countries in a position to do so to include mine action in their official development assistance programs. We firmly believe, where appropriate, that mine action can contribute substantively towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Mine Action is also a key component in building a broader and sustainable peace among combatants. Humanitarian demining is now recognised as a confidence-building measure in war-torn societies, and is often one of the first issues upon which disputing parties can agree. It requires cooperation, which opens a dialogue and builds trust, while victim assistance and mine risk education have been identified as among the first services that should reach vulnerable groups, both during hostilities and after they have ceased.

Canada is committed to meeting its obligations in support the universalization and implementation of the Ottawa Convention as specified in Article 6. This commitment has been affirmed in concrete terms by more than \$200 million in dedicated resources we have committed for mine action since 1997. We will do our utmost to maintain this level, and potentially increase it over time, through a concerted mainstreaming strategy that will eventually result in the integration of mine action programming into core departmental budgets. This will ensure that the humanitarian objectives of the Convention are achieved, and its sustainability for the long-term is assured.

Madame Chair,

Canadian support for all aspects of mine action will continue to take fully into account the needs and priorities of mine-affected States Parties. As we have consistently stated, Canada fully supports the vision, and the realistic goal, of a mine-free world. Inherent to this objective is the legal obligation States Parties have accepted to clear all known or suspected mined land within their specified ten-year timeframe. The obligations of Article 5 are clear and, we believe, completely unambiguous. The interim phase of achieving a “mine-safe” status, while laudable, should only be considered as an important step towards full compliance with Article 5 obligations. This step is also an important measure for mine-affected states in developing priorities for clearance, and therefore, should not be considered as an end in itself. The future holds many challenges with respect to mine clearance; however the goal of mine-free is achievable, and attainable in our lifetime.

With 147 States now Party to the Convention, we have made rapid progress toward universalization. Canada is proud to coordinate the Universalization Contact Group; we are confident that number of States Parties will continue to grow. As the only legitimate framework for addressing the scourge of anti-personnel landmines, universalising the Convention remains the key element of realising a mine-free world. Taking into account the priority regions outlined in the Nairobi Action Plan, Canada has undertaken a number of initiatives over the past year to further universalise the Convention throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and Central and Southeast Asia.

While it is encouraging that the number of new reported landmine casualties continues to decline, with every incident the number of landmine survivors is obviously on the rise. Victim assistance remains a priority for Canada as does enhancing and protecting the lives all those with war-related injuries or disabilities in general. Canada wishes to take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the efforts many mine-affected states have undertaken to develop or strengthen national legislation and policies that will meet the needs of survivors within the broader context of rights for all disabled persons. We encourage mine-affected states to develop national plans for addressing the needs of landmine survivors in this context.

Canada continues to be actively involved in stockpile destruction around the world. Either on a bilateral basis or in cooperation with other donors, we have assisted nearly two dozen countries in destroying some four and a half million stockpiled mines, and are currently supporting stockpile destruction projects in Afghanistan, Belarus and Serbia and Montenegro to destroy an additional two million. As the current Co-Chair of the Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction, Canada has been pleased with the progress many States Parties have made on this front and will continue to assist State Parties in fulfilling their Article 4 obligations.

Madame Chair,

All of us gathered here in Zagreb, States Parties, International Organizations and NGOs, understand well that the spirit of shared responsibility and genuine partnership that, from the beginning, has characterized the global campaign against anti-personnel landmines is an essential ingredient to eliminating them. Future progress will clearly require that we sustain and strengthen these partnerships, and as we forge new ones, that we coordinate our various interests and initiatives in accordance with the Nairobi Action Plan.

While challenges lie ahead, it is important to bear in mind that we all share the same vision -- a world free from the scourge of anti-personnel landmines. Only through the universalization and full implementation of the Ottawa Convention can we ensure that this vision will be realised.

Thank you, Madame Chair.