



**Sixth 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**

Zagreb, 28 November – 2 December 2005

**Statement by Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga
President of the Geneva International Centre
for Humanitarian Demining
at the Opening Session**

Let me first thank and congratulate the Government of Croatia for being the host of this Sixth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention and for having organised such a wonderful opening ceremony. You have succeeded in creating the environment for a good outcome of this Meeting in your country, itself heavily affected by landmines and recovering from so many humanitarian issues that I witnessed here in the early 1990's.

At the end of this week we will be celebrating the Eighth Anniversary of the signature by 121 States in Ottawa of the Treaty banning anti-personnel mines. Still, today, I feel the fervour of all people and States who were involved in the fight against landmines during the 1990s : from my appeal as ICRC President for a total ban in early 1994, to the Ottawa Conference of October 1996 and to the adoption of the treaty text at the diplomatic conference in Oslo on 18 September 1997.

From the very first meeting of States Parties in Maputo, the capital city of a mine-affected country; then Geneva, Managua, Geneva again, Bangkok, Nairobi and now Zagreb; all are places which have witnessed the enthusiastic gathering of States Parties. Today, this enthusiasm allows us to count 147 States Parties to the Convention. I am also pleased that several other countries are here as observers, and some of them plan to join our community soon. To my satisfaction, they already abide by their humanitarian obligations, and have spontaneously provided assistance to fellow countries affected by the plague of landmines.

We can proudly emphasize that the spirit of partnership and cooperation between States, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) – representing the civil society -, the United Nations (UN) and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) – who is proud to have established the Implementation Support Unit of your Convention - this spirit of partnership has allowed the Convention to become an historic and unique achievement over these few years.

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, let us continue to strongly demand that all States cease to use, produce or transfer anti-personnel mines. Non-state armed groups should also embrace this international norm by signing the Deed of Commitment. Let me in this connection, commend the efforts of the Geneva Call, who have brought about 30 non-state actors to sign this commitment.

While we should be proud of our successes, we cannot relax and be retrospective. Too much human suffering remains, too much work still lies ahead and too many problems remain yet unresolved. This was the clear conclusion of the 2004 Review Conference in Nairobi, and what the out-going

President, Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, insistently repeated over the last two years, and right he was ! Yes, the *Nairobi Action Plan* is showing us the way to a world free from landmines, with its seventy (70) concrete actions States Parties have agreed to implement between now and 2009.

The destruction of existing stockpiles is one obvious first step, easy to achieve with military means, as shown with almost 38 million mines destroyed. Nevertheless, continued financial support, material and technical assistance are needed by more than a dozen countries that have to meet their deadline in the coming months and years.

Identifying, marking and fencing of suspected areas, and more importantly clearance of mined areas will be the overriding challenge to be addressed. Several countries will however be able to meet the 2009 deadline, but other heavily mine-affected nations will need to produce an enormous effort to meet this deadline. They should not be left alone and must be supported more decisively with any possible means. Let us in this context never forget the victims. We have a moral obligation to reduce the number of casualties and to assist landmine survivors, in particular in those State Parties who have reported to be facing serious challenges with their medical and rehabilitation facilities, as well in the socio-economic reintegration.

Finally, I should like to recall what I have said so often in the past, in order to improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of mine action, we need to build on past experiences. Mine action has to remain a priority in humanitarian policies of all States Parties. But simultaneously development plans and programmes should also include clearance of mined areas and assistance to victims. This would be also an important step in the achievement of the *UN Millennium Development Goals* by those States Parties heavily affected by landmines.

Let me conclude with the words of Poul Hartling, when he was receiving the 1981 Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, on behalf of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees: “... *I appeal to each and everyone: let us never cease to feel compassion for those in want, let us never tire of helping victims He who puts his faith in the restoration of human dignity, cannot be wrong!*”
