



STATEMENT OF H.E. AMBASSADOR SAM SOTHA
HEAD OF CAMBODIAN DELEGATION AT THE OPENING OF
THE 9TH MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO MINE BAN CONVENTION

PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA, 24 NOVEMBER, 2008

Mr. President, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;
Distinguished Delegates;

Mr. President, on behalf of the Cambodian delegation let me congratulate you on your election as President of the 9MSP. We believe that under your leadership we will work towards a successful meeting during this time of change and challenge to our Convention. I would also like to congratulate and thank Prince Mired of Jordan for his tireless work and leadership over the past year.

During the past year, Cambodia has made tremendous progress on many fronts, including mine clearance, victim assistance, research and development for new technologies and Mine Risk Education. These achievements and other issues of interest will be presented by my delegation during the appropriate sessions this week, including a summary of our work in progress for the upcoming Article 5 Extension Request and our new National Strategy for Mine Action.

Mr. President, Cambodia remains one the countries most affected by landmines. Despite the unwavering effort of the Cambodian government and its long term partners, mines continue to kill and injure civilians, deny access to productive land and strike fear in the hearts of people living in contaminated areas. We continue to work, day by day, to achieve safety and prosperity for those who have been, or might one day be, victims of these inhumane weapons.

Mr. President, in response to Thailand's statement made earlier during this session, it was with great sadness that we learned of allegations that Cambodia had contravened their obligations under the Ottawa Convention by laying new mines along the Thai Cambodian border. For a country that has suffered such heavy losses, the claim that we had contravened the most basic and fundamental tenet of the Convention came as a great surprise.

In the clearest possible language, we deny the insinuations made to that effect. Cambodia has written two official letters through the Implementation Support Unit of the AP Mine Ban Convention to provide clarification, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Cambodia sent out an official bilateral response last week outlining its response to specific allegations.

I would like to provide some clarity of the timing of the events so that the meeting is not left confused by the recent statement made by Thailand.

1. Thailand issued an informal request for clarification (it was actually an aide memoir) to Cambodia on 17 October 2008. This was not a request for clarification in accordance with Convention or other procedures, as it did not contain all appropriate information. It was based on an investigation conducted internally by Thai authorities with no independent verification. No further detailed information has at any point been sent to Cambodia.
2. Three days **before** sending this request to Cambodia, the Thai MFA held a press conference with a number of embassies represented in Bangkok. Thus Cambodia heard of these allegations along with the entire diplomatic corps in Thailand.
3. On 20 October 2008, 3 days after the request for clarification was issued, Thailand went further to issue an Information Note which was circulated to all Permanent Missions to the United Nations.

Given the seriousness of the claims and the importance which Cambodia places on its international commitments, the Royal Government of Cambodia immediately ordered the formation of a Fact Finding Commission to thoroughly review the situation 3 days after receiving the request for clarification from Thailand. The Commission is chaired by the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of National Defense and is composed of members from several institutions involved in Mine Action. The Commission will complete its work in the near future, and we will share the findings of the report with Thailand and those concerned and other interested parties.

To clarify to the meeting, I would like to confirm that the accident happened in a confirmed minefield on Cambodian territory.

As one of the pioneers of the movement to ban landmines, Cambodia remains fully committed to the humanitarian and legal principles of the Convention. We do not believe this plenary is the best forum for this discussion, which Cambodia maintains is a bilateral issue which can be solved through open discussion by two neighbors.

I would like to finish by thanking all of the partners with whom we have worked over the years to help reduce the painful, persistent legacies of the protracted conflict in Cambodia. We remain, as always, fully committed to making people in our country and abroad safe from the threat of landmines.