

Regional Mine Action Seminar in the Americas
"En Camino hacia un Hemisferio Libre de Minas Antipersonal"
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Presentation by the Head of the Regional Delegation
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
for Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru

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- As many of you know, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an independent institution, whose strict humanitarian mandate consists of protecting the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence, as well as offering these victims assistance. The ICRC seeks to prevent suffering, promoting and consolidating human rights, as well as the universalization of fundamental principles.
- The ICRC, in conjunction with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the government of Canada and a number of other governments, multiplied its efforts during the 1990s in order to stigmatize anti-personnel landmines and ensure the success of the negotiations that culminated with the adoption and signing of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction* of 1997 (known as the Ottawa Convention). The ICRC joined its efforts in response to the devastating human cost that antipersonnel mines signify, of which the delegates were witness to in the stages of armed conflicts and in battlefields throughout the world.
- Allow me to unite with other speakers in congratulating **Guyana** for its recent ratification of this Convention. Now that all the States in the hemisphere have adopted the treaty, South America is on its way to becoming the first "antipersonnel mine free zone" in the world.
- If we stop to analyze other manifestations of Latin America as a world leader on anti-personnel mines, this year **Costa Rica** has become the first State to be declared completely demined. It seems that other states in Central America -Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua - are making efforts in this demining front.
- I would also like to salute the initiative of **Colombia** who, in ratifying the Ottawa Convention in 2000, has committed itself to destroying anti-personnel mines although they find themselves engulfed in an internal conflict. Also, it is important to highlight that this country has commented that **antipersonnel mines have no military utility**, just as other State Parties of the Convention, such as the Philippines and the Democratic Republic of Congo have done.
- Since the Ottawa Convention entered into force four years ago, we have witnessed impressive progress throughout the world, in both the universal adhesion to the treaty as well as in its implementation. Today, 135 States are Parties to the Convention; together, they have destroyed around 30 million antipersonnel mines; More than 1.5 billion USD has been utilized for mine action programs (demining, victim assistance, mine risk education) and, in many areas important progress has been registered in mine removal.

- However, without ignoring these achievements, there are still many important challenges that have to be fulfilled concerning the issues of the Ottawa Convention regarding assistance to landmine victims and their communities. Millions of antipersonnel mines remain a great threat and cause a lot of suffering in many countries throughout the world. It is imperative to ensure global adherence to the treaty as well as to the fulfillment of the goals of the Convention.
- The State Parties should comply with all their obligations, destroying their stockpiled mines and initiating mine action programs according to the Convention—in particular, it is important to mention that the deadlines for stockpile destruction in Venezuela, and Argentina is November 2003 and April 2004 respectfully. The State Parties should also assist their landmine survivors and develop mine risk education programs in mine-affected communities. They should also adopt legislation to establish punitive mechanisms for those who infringe on the Convention. Only through determined and comprehensive actions will this "global epidemic" be ended.
- The period understood as between the **First Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention, to be held in Nairobi in 2004**, and the arrival of the deadline for the conclusion of demining operations in many of the mine-affected States in 2009 will be crucial to ensure that they comply with the deadline. It is very important that the political will and the financial commitments be maintained, and if possible increased. In particular, the ICRC considers extremely important that, thanks to the First Review Conference, the mine affected State Parties have developed their national mine action programs—demining, mine risk education campaigns and assistance to mine victims and their communities—and also that they have the opportunity to present the needed proposals in order to complete their stockpile destruction and demining within the deadline established by the Convention. The ICRC encourages all the mine-affected States of the American continent that have yet to develop their mine action programs to do so and reminds them that they can request support from the United Nations or other organisms and NGOs. {cf. Art.6 (7) of the Ottawa Convention}.
- The ICRC and other members of the International movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent continue their commitment of reaching the humanitarian objectives of the Ottawa Convention and contribute to the achievement of a mine-free world. From that premises **mine action programs** are carried out. Within the framework of these activities, the effects of UXO are included. **Concerning the landmine problem, the activities of the ICRC fall into four categories:**
 - 1) **Assistance and support in the areas of health** (first aid, hospital assistance, surgical and medical assistance) to those injured in the war, including the victims of anti-personnel mines and UXO.

In **Colombia**, the ICRC continues offering and facilitating access to special medical care for the victims of the armed conflict. In **Nicaragua**, we support the ambulances of the Nicaraguan Red Cross and the first aid team that accompanies the demining platoons of the army. Here in **Peru**, the ICRC has assisted in covering the costs or surgical care for those injured during the armed conflict, including victims of antipersonnel mines.

- 2) **Executing and supporting physical rehabilitation projects** benefiting people with disabilities as a consequence of war, including victims of anti-personnel mines and UXO.

In 2002, the ICRC offered and carried out support of 53 projects in 21 countries around the world. In **Nicaragua**, the Special Foundations the ICRC for disabled

people supports the national prosthetic center, training personnel and offering financial support or donation of prosthetics, wheelchairs and crutches.

- 3) **Execution and support of mine risk education programs**, to reduce the dangers in affected communities.

In 2002, the ICRC carried out mine risk education activities, in many cases, in cooperation with national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 16 countries throughout the world. This activity included **Nicaragua**, where the ICRC supports the Nicaraguan Red Cross in the execution of their mine risk education program "de niño a niño," and here in **Peru**, we carried out a press campaign of education concerning the dangers of mines located around the high-tension towers and carried out a mine risk education campaign. This year, in collaboration with the Peruvian National Police, CONTRAMINAS and the OAS, 275 teachers and 110 communal leaders of the departments of Junin and Huancavelica were trained with the objective of disseminating the message of the dangers. My colleague, Dafne Matros, will be able to explain the ways in which the ICRC carries out the prevention program and, in particular, will be able to explain why these programs are carried out with a focus from the communities themselves.

- 4) **Promotion for the compliance with the Ottawa Convention** and support to those governments to ensure implementation. This includes that, through the Consultant service of the IHD, the ICRC offers juridical consultations to the states in the development of legislation compatible with Article 9 of the Ottawa Convention. In many countries, this work is within the agenda of the national humanitarian demining commissions. My colleague, Marisela Silva, will offer a more detailed presentation tomorrow in terms of this aspect of the work carried out by the ICRC.

I would like to conclude my observations returning to the theme of demining. The ICRC is conscious of the importance of this activity because, until this task is concluded, the mine risk education and the assistance to victims will be constant necessities in affected communities.

Consequently, the ICRC should highlight the importance and necessity that the mine-affected states, in accordance with what is established in the Ottawa Convention, begin and implement their national demining plans as soon as possible, and above all, before the Review Conference in 2004.

Finally, I want to take the opportunity to **reiterate that the ICRC is willing to continue supporting**, within its competence, **the States that assume the task of complying with the international obligations of the Ottawa Convention.**

Thank you.