

STATEMENT BY MR. WILLIAM A. MCDONOUGH, HEAD OF DELEGATION OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES TO THE "FOURTH MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE USE, STOCKPILING, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION"

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, SEPTEMBER 16-20, 2002

Mr. Chairman,

First of all, allow me Mr. Chairman, to present OAS Secretary General, Dr. Cesar Gaviria's warmest regards to all the distinguished delegates of this important meeting. Due to work related commitments in the Americas, Dr. Gaviria was not able to attend this conference, but he extends his best wishes for its success.

We would congratulate Your Excellency on your election to chair this Fourth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Landmines and on their Destruction. Your wide experience and knowledge of the Convention and mine action help assure a successful mission.

Mr. Chairman, your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to join other speakers on behalf of the OAS in thanking the Swiss Government for its generosity in hosting the Fourth Meeting of States Parties and for its hospitality to the many delegations represented here today.

I also wish to avail myself of this opportunity to congratulate the Government of Nicaragua and all participants for the success of the important Third Meeting of the States Parties which demonstrated our collective resolve in following up on the operation of the Ottawa Convention.

We should also recognize the continued significant role played by the Intersessional Work Program undertaken by the Standing Committees of Experts. These meetings in January and May contribute greatly to a timely international cooperation on important matters relating to the Convention as an instrument for Mine Action and for co-operation among Governments, International Organization, and Non Governmental Organizations.

The Organization of American States is proud to have supported the unprecedented international efforts, which resulted in the Ottawa Convention. Not only because of the terrible suffering that mines inflict on innocent civilians, but also because their effect goes beyond the individual victim to cripple the social and economic development of the affected communities. The presence of the mines is a fundamental threat to people's lives and wellbeing and a barrier to free access to productive land, water, fuel, and services such as health and education.

The OAS recognizes the importance of an integrated and holistic response to the issue of the landmine crisis, and the need to provide sound and lasting support to those who are at risk. We have worked very hard during the past year to assist our Member States in achieving their mine action goals in a number of contexts. These efforts have included activity in the areas of: universalization of the convention, demining operations, victim assistance, mine awareness and risk reduction education and stockpile destruction as well as efforts to expand the use of a common database management system (IMSMA).

Many activities in the area of regional mine action have already been reported by the OAS Member States Parties in their individual interventions and will not be repeated. For information purposes, we have compiled a brief summary report, which will be available as a conference document. Additionally, we would like to emphasize three points on information management, financial resources and technical challenges of mine action in the Americas.

In the area of information management and financial needs, we would note that during the UNMAS Program Managers meeting (Geneva, February 2002), the OAS offered to produce a portfolio of mine action projects similar in nature and format to that produced annually by UNMAS. Its purpose is to complement UN efforts in complying with their global mine action information management responsibility and at the same, time provide donors, operators and others a compatible portrait of the regional mine action efforts planned in the Americas for the remainder of 2002 and 2003. We used the IMSMA system operating in Nicaragua in the development of the portfolio and it proved very helpful in organizing the document. A limited number of these portfolio documents are available in Spanish and English directly from members of our delegation. We would be pleased to discuss

the operational and financial content of the portfolio, as well as the use of the IMSMA system for its production with any interested delegation.

The financial needs outlined in the 2002/2003 Portfolio have been coordinated with the individual national demining programs. These requirements are for sustainment of ongoing mine action efforts in the region. No new units or efforts are contemplated, in large measure due to the financial constraints under which we have operated for more than a year now. Those difficulties were reported during the Managua Meeting last year. Since that time, OAS mine affected Member States have become increasingly active in seeking needed resources. This effort resulted in part in the "Call from Managua" document presented by Nicaragua during Monday's session. The current financial situation in the region is so critical that several important programs; to include Honduras, Guatemala and Front #4 in Nicaragua will be forced to halt demining operations at the end of October if renewed donor support is not secured.

Also in the financial area we would note that although OAS and Colombia have not yet signed a cooperative agreement, considerable advances in their national mine action efforts have been made. Colombia continues to address the requirements of the Convention and the national reality of landmines, even as fresh mines and explosive artefacts are sown by the those elements in conflict with the established government. Colombia's financial needs although different and not reflected in the OAS Portfolio are likewise urgent.

Within the region, we would compliment Nicaragua for its leadership and its hosting of the recent regional mine action conference which has been invaluable in helping the mine affected countries of the Americas prepare for this week's meetings. The national mine action programs in Peru and Ecuador continue to develop at a very promising rate, and demonstrate important cooperation between the two nations toward completion of their efforts. Guatemala continues its successful efforts as well. Progress there can be measured in the reduced number of accidents and incidents involving innocent civilians in contact with unexploded artefacts. Cost Rica, we are pleased to note, appears poised to declare itself mine free in the very near future.

Finally, we had expected that Honduras would have reported itself mine free at this meeting, were it not for significant technical difficulties encountered in the final seven kilometers of national border to be demined. The Las Canoas area has presented the difficult and simultaneous technical challenges of laterite or high metallic content soil, compounded by the presence of antitank and antipersonnel mines and heavy sedimentation resulting from Hurricane Mitch four years ago. This sedimentation has left mines buried at depths of 20, 30 and 40 or more centimeters. Honduras has been hard at work for many years now, and deserves the technical and financial support needed to complete the final 75,000 square meters of its humanitarian work.

Mr. Chairman, your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

In conclusion, we view the sharing of information and lessons learned from ongoing mine action efforts in the context of this meeting as important, to enhance the impact of policies and strategies, and to reduce duplication of efforts and waste of resources. In this regard we would encourage continued efforts in developing and improving productive partnerships among affected countries, donors, international organizations, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. The battle against mines can only be successful if we commit ourselves to build better coordination and cooperation amongst and between those of us dedicated to the proposition of a mine free world.

This Meeting of the States Parties offers a unique and invaluable opportunity to make practical advances, which will bring closer the day when the last antipersonnel landmine has been destroyed. It is for that reason that we, as the regional international organization of the Americas, and on behalf of its Member States, renew our appeal to the international community to continue its cooperation, its dedication and its generosity until we achieve our important objective of a mine free society.

Thank you.