



## **Statement by Geneva Call**

**8 May 2006, Standing Committees**

**General Status of Universalization**

Mr. President, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to see you all here again in the name of a common effort and a common cause: to eliminate the threat of anti-personnel mines.

In this common effort, Geneva Call, in cooperation with its partners in the field, tries to play a specific role, in a specific niche: that of engaging armed non-State actors.

I would like to underline today that numerous States, UN agencies, inter-governmental organizations, the ICRC and NGOs are now convinced of the importance of engaging all mine users, including non-State actors, as a complement to the Mine Ban Treaty, which is designed to be signed and implemented by States. There is also increasing recognition of the decisive role that States can play in this complementary process. The inclusion of Action 46 in the Nairobi Action Plan was an important step in that regard.

As this article mentions, and I quote: States Parties will: *“Continue to support, as appropriate, mine action to assist affected populations in areas under the control of armed non-State actors, particularly in areas under the control of actors which have agreed to abide by the Convention’s norms.”* This is generally accomplished through the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment.

Today we would like to request governments to implement Action 46 in a thorough and specific manner. I say this because, in the last few months, we have faced a number of difficulties: countries where we were refused authorization to travel, or allowed to travel only to the capital; countries where armed groups were ready to destroy their stockpiles, but failed to do so on account of political and travel restrictions or lack of money; countries where we were not allowed to start mine action activities for political reasons, despite the agreement of the armed group. While saying that, I should also mention that, in many other countries, we have an excellent relationship with the authorities and work in full collaboration with them, for which we are sincerely grateful. We would also like to thank all our donors whose support

has enabled us to make progress in the field with activities such as de-mining, stockpile destruction, mine risk education, and victim assistance in areas under the control of armed groups.

We know that we are working in a very politically and militarily sensitive context. We recognize that some governments don't want to run the risk of giving any kind of recognition to the armed groups operating in their territory. But rejecting proposals purely and simply is a position that ignores humanitarian needs. We believe that we have a duty, first and foremost, to consider and respect humanitarian needs, irrespective of the political or military context.

Last week we met with members of a community in a mine affected country and promised to speak on their behalf today. They told us that armed groups had laid mines around their village. The population knows where they are and have repeatedly requested the authorities to clear them, without reply. Now the number of new victims is escalating and the population is increasingly desperate. We have no right to forget them.

In a workshop – entitled *Mine Action in the Midst of Internal Conflict* – that Geneva Call organized in Zagreb in conjunction with the ICBL, it was stressed that article 4 of the Mine Ban Treaty states that each State Party undertakes to destroy or **ensure** the destruction of all stockpiled anti-personnel mines it owns or possesses, or that are under its jurisdiction *or* control; and, in article 5, that each State Party undertakes to destroy or **ensure** the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction *or* control.

That means that if a State Party faces difficulties such as a failure to exercise control over part of its territory, it must at least facilitate efforts to clear and destroy mines in any part of its territory controlled by non-State actors. It ought to facilitate efforts made by third parties (e.g. other States, international organisations or NGOs) to carry out mine action in those areas. It also has a duty vis-à-vis its own populations living in territories under the control of armed groups.

That is what we could achieve in several countries, working closely with both sides, States and non-States actors, proving it is possible and contributing to a real universalization in the field.

Today we call upon States who are still reluctant to do the same in a similar cooperative spirit. For ultimately, the common cause and effort that I referred to earlier is to save innocent lives.