

**Summary on Regional Seminar on Landmines in South East Asia
Before the Standing Committee on General Status and Its Operation
Monday 27 May 2002**

Thank you Mr. Co-Chairs,

I would like to take this opportunity to present a brief summary of the Seminar on Landmines in Southeast Asia which was hosted by Thailand on May 13 and 14, 2002, with the support by the Governments of Australia, Canada and Japan. The general objectives of the seminar were to:

- share information and experiences regarding the landmine and unexploded ordnance problem in Southeast Asia;
- discuss the humanitarian principles of mine action, and alternatives to antipersonnel mines;
- address cooperation mechanisms in the field of mine action, as well as the framework for mine action provided by the Ottawa Convention;
- build increased momentum in Southeast Asia toward a comprehensive approach in addressing the humanitarian crisis of landmines

The Seminar brought together civil and military officials from 8 ASEAN member countries which are Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as an observer from Papua New Guinea, distinguished participants from donor countries, Ios and NGOs which have been playing an active role in supporting mine action activities in Southeast Asian region

The seminar also provided an open forum for the exchange of information and views on landmines among experts and practitioners and provided an opportunity for countries in the region to discuss about the possibilities to build increased momentum toward a comprehensive regional approach in addressing the humanitarian crisis of landmines.

The Seminar also provided an opportunity for a representative of landmine survivors to voice their concern and needs, and to urge states in the region and elsewhere in the world to also focus their attention on finding the best ways to help, support and give hope to the victims of landmines.

The first session of the Seminar provided the participants with an overview of the landmine and unexploded ordnance situation in South East Asia, as well as social, economic and humanitarian impacts of landmines.

Participants heard about the challenges to be met if the region is to successfully address the landmine issue, including among others the need to agree on a common platform for action; the necessity to tackle effectively supply and demand factors; the requirement for both states and non-state actors to be engaged in this issue; the importance of addressing the issue of security, including human security; the need for transparency mechanisms;

the fact that both the short and long-term needs of victims should be met; the requirement that civil society be provided with enough space to fulfill its role in monitoring the progress made; the further requirement that international financial aid and technical help should be sustained, and that the recipient States must themselves provide sufficient resources towards mine action; and finally, the need to engage in both curative and preventive actions.

Following the presentation on an overview of the landmine and UXO situation in Southeast Asia, Stockpile destruction, victim assistance and mine clearance and technology were discussed among interested participants. In each session, ASEAN member countries were invited to give their presentation on national experiences regarding the above-mentioned issues.

On stockpile destruction, participants were provided with detailed technical information about some of the technologies and methods used in the destruction of stockpile of mines, as well as the possible cooperation mechanisms existing today. These presentations and exchanges provided opportunities for further cooperation in this field, and representatives from Malaysia and Australia offered to share their expertise. At the end of the session, the possibility of cooperating with each other in order to find effective solutions to problems like stockpile destruction was stressed.

A further discussion took place on the internationally recognized standards and methods used in stockpile destruction, as well as on the type of support available in mine action and the possibility of looking at commercial applications in order to reduce costs.

Discussion on victim assistance highlighted the necessity of cooperation. The participants were reminded that it is difficult to measure the success of a victim assistance program, and that cooperation between government agencies and NGOs is vital in order for these programs to produce positive results. It was also underlined that while we can successfully address the problem together, victim assistance is a long-term commitment requiring policy changes and cooperation between countries, and that together we need to look at long-term, socio-economic solutions.

During mine clearance and Technology session, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos presented in detail the mine situation in their respective countries, the framework utilized and the work plan established to address this situation, the various components of their mine and UXO programs, the technologies used, and the resources requirements they were facing. Each speaker shared some of the lessons that have been learned since the establishment of their programs, and offered to share their expertise and technology for the benefit of the countries of the region.

The discussion following the presentation again focused on the value of collaboration and exchange of information based on the lessons learned.

The Seminar then moved on to international Cooperation on the landmines problem, focusing on the Ottawa Convention as the only comprehensive response to the landmine

problem, underscoring that it is a practical minded, global and flexible mechanism. Main elements of the Ottawa Convention, the overview on mechanism and process to facilitate the implementation of the Convention was presented to the Conference, followed by presentations on elements of an integrated mine action programme.

This session also addressed mine action and the UN system, touching on the principles of UN action, the roles of the UN, and on the required elements for an integrated Mine Action program. It was stressed that effective information management is crucial for the success of all aspects of a UN mine action program. As part of this, the E-MINE website was highlighted, as an important gateway to access updated mine action information.

The session also focused on tools provided by the UNDP to assist mine affected countries in establishing policy and operational coordination mechanisms that are appropriate to their own circumstances, and that have the following principles in common: sound management, prioritization based on socio-economic impact, quality, and sustainability.

The last session of the meeting focussed on discussion to explore possible regional cooperation in Southeast Asia for the solution to the landmines problem. An open forum for informal exchange of information and ideas was provided. The regional cooperation was emphasized as it is considered to be an effective tool in finding long-term solutions, encouraging international, sustained efforts for mine action. Regional coordination has proven more effective when established in the framework of political commitment, due largely to the engagement of political leadership and clearly identified obligations such as those expressed under the Ottawa Convention.

General discussion among ASEAN member countries brought up several significant ideas as ways to promote regional collaboration in mine action which are :

- Urgent need to set up an effective mechanism for regional cooperation;
- Collective political will from ASEAN countries to address landmines problem;
- Need for exchange of information and best practices in relation to mine action;
- Necessity of bilateral, regional and international cooperation in combating landmines;
- Establishment of a strategic network of civil society representatives, including academics and media;
- Need to continue attracting international assistance from donor countries as well as IOs and NGOs;
- Explore possibility of setting up ASEAN Voluntary Trust Fund for Landmines
- Necessity for ASEAN States Parties to the Ottawa Convention to enact national legislation to translate the commitment under the Convention into real action,

Thailand, as the host of the seminar, will report all of these ideas and the summary of the entire seminar to the next Senior Officials Meeting in July this year, as a follow up to

Thailand's initiative in bringing the landmine problems to the attention of our ASEAN colleagues, which proposed during the SOM in Hanoi, in July 2001. The seminar is considered as part of our attempt to explore concrete cooperation in combating landmine problems in the regional framework.

Again, Thailand as the host, hopes that the participants, in particular, our friends in Southeast Asia have possessed a greater understanding in relation to the landmine problem in Southeast Asia, and the opportunities available to them in addressing the problem, especially in terms of regional collaboration.

To conclude my brief summary, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Governments of Australia, Canada and Japan for their kind support in making this seminar happen. We look forward to future cooperation in this kind as part of our inspiration to achieve our common goal in creating a world free of landmines.

Thank you, Mr. Co-chair.