

10 May 2006

**STATEMENT BY THE TURKISH DELEGATION
DURING THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
ON MINE CLEARANCE, MINE RISK EDUCATION
AND MINE ACTION TECHNOLOGIES**

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Allow me to begin by warmly congratulating you on your assumption of the Co-Chairmanship. Our warm wishes also go to the Co-Rapporteurs. My delegation had requested the floor earlier, but since you, Co-Chairs, enjoy my delegation's full support and cooperation, we did not mind waiting.

Co-Chairs,

I would like to commend the Greek Cypriot delegation for politicising this technical meeting without looking too much like they have. However, we and the distinguished delegations gathered here know better.

References were made by the Greek Cypriot representative to Turkey's obligations under the Ottawa Convention. Indeed, Turkey joined the Ottawa Convention in 2004. Hence, Turkey will most certainly carry out its obligations stemming from this Convention and is doing so as we speak.

As for the areas on the Island, that are not under the effective control or jurisdiction of the Greek Cypriot Administration, if the Greek Cypriots truly care about ridding the Island from the scourge of landmines, we suggest that they get in touch with those that have those areas under their effective control or jurisdiction, namely the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

Since the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is not represented in this forum, my delegation would like to make a few additional points for the sake of clarity.

Demining along the Green Line was in fact brought on the agenda with the initiative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus on the 24th of July 2003. Negotiations were held between the Turkish Cypriot authorities and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) regarding mine clearance in the buffer zone in Lefkoşa and its vicinity. An agreement to this end was successfully concluded on the 5th of August 2005. The fact that work on this issue did not commence earlier, is the result of circumstances beyond the control of the Turkish Cypriot side.

Turning now to the actual work being conducted, as a result of mine clearance, 5 out of 13 minefields in the area were cleared. Sixty three landmines and UXOs of various types have been detected and destroyed in the buffer zone.

The mine clearance activities are being carried out by an international company that specialises in these types of activities and Mine Action Group makes sure that the clearance is carried out in accordance with international mine action standards.

One of the last areas to be cleared in this way was the vicinity of the Lokmacı Barricade. This area was cleared and certified as clean of landmines and booby traps on the 2nd of September 2005 so that reciprocal border crossings can take place.

I can assure you that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is doing everything in its power to rid the Island of the scourge of landmines and have been doing so since 2003. I would be more than happy to get interested participants in touch with competent Turkish Cypriot Authorities for further updates.

Moving onto the mine clearance presentation Turkey had originally planned to make, as requested, we will focus on updates and new information only and refrain from repeating previous statements.

Co-Chairs,

The number of mines cleared by Turkey stands at 17,886, which is the same as the figure given by the Turkish Delegation during the 6th Meeting of States Parties in Zagreb. This is because the harsh winter conditions in mined areas usually prevent mine clearance activities until the month of May of each year. Mine clearance activities ought to commence any day now.

The number of mines emplaced within Turkey's borders is 984,313, which include 819,816 anti-personnel mines and 164,497 anti-vehicle mines. The informed campaigner will note that this is an increase from last year's figure of 919,855, which also included both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. This is due to the fact that fields which were suspected of being minefields, indeed, turned out to be minefields. Another update that we would like to give is that the number of Turkish General Staff personnel involved in mine clearance activities has risen from 325 to 461 in 2005.

Co-Chairs,

Turkey, having joined the Ottawa Convention in 2004, has deadlines that are further ahead than most. However, Turkey is not complacent, takes its obligations seriously and is doing everything in its power to complete its obligations on time. In the meanwhile, mined areas continue remain marked, fenced and monitored according to international standards.

I thank you, Distinguished Co-Chairs.