

Opening of the 8-12 May 2006 of meetings of the Standing Committees

**Ambassador Stephan Nellen
Director of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining**

8 May 2006

-- check against delivery --

As human beings we have some odd natural affinity for round numbers. In this context let's not forget that over the next 20 months we'll encounter the 10th anniversary of major events in our collective effort to end the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines:

- On October 5th of this year, it will have been 10 years since then Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy challenged the world to negotiate a simple and clear treaty banning anti-personnel mines.
- On September 18th of next year it will be 10 years since such a treaty was adopted in Oslo.
- And on December 3rd of next year it will be both 10 years since the Convention's signing ceremony in Ottawa and 10 years since the intention to establish the GICHD was announced.

With 10th anniversaries on the near-term agenda, we must recall that we've been at this for some time. After 10 years there is an expectation that we've made progress. Ten-years, after all, was originally conceived as a reasonable amount of time for most States to organize themselves to identify mined areas and to subsequently clear them. Moreover, 10 years is a long time if you're a landmine survivor waiting for an equalization of economic and other opportunities.

Not only is there an expectation that progress should have been made, but there is an expectation that we should have amassed a great deal of knowledge and information. Indeed we have. And much of this is contained in key on-line information sources that concern the Convention which are on display outside of this room.

The matter of expectations is important for us to keep in mind this week. The Convention – with its promise of ending – for all people for all time – the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines – set high expectations. Our work this week is all about assessing the extent to which we are on track to meeting these expectations.

After having recently visited Yemen and Sudan, the particular expectations of landmine survivors are top of top-of-mind to me. It is important that those States Parties that have indicated that they are responsible for significant numbers of landmine survivors proceed with establishing objectives that are specific to their individual country contexts and with developing and implementing national plans. And, it is important that all others in a position to do so assist. In this regard, the GICHD is pleased to do what it can in offering process support to the inter-ministerial coordination efforts being undertaken by relevant States Parties.

I'm sure we'll hear more about the efforts of relevant States Parties with respect to meeting victim assistance expectations later today. The value of the Intersessional Work Programme after all is to effectively exchange information with a view to meeting expectations we have made to each other and to ordinary people

everywhere – expectations that we will work assist victims, clear all anti-personnel mines, destroy all stockpiled anti-personnel mines and pursue universal acceptance of the Convention.

Before you proceed with your work, I wish to commend the Croatian delegation for its leadership in presiding over the Convention this year and the Co-Chairs for preparing a very substantial intersessional programme of work. I wish to also acknowledge and thank Canada and the European Commission for providing interpretation at the meetings this week. This is an important contribution that helps ensure the active participation in and ownership of the Convention by a wide range of actors.

Finally, allow me to extend an invitation to all Standing Committee participants to join me at a reception which will be held immediately following the close of the afternoon session tomorrow, at 6:00 p.m.

With that said, I wish you all the best for a productive week.