



ICRC

**Fifth Meeting
of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition
of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines
and on their Destruction**

**Bangkok
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Statement by Professor Dr. Daniel Thürer

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Geneva**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), I would like to thank the Government of Thailand for hosting the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines. As you know, the ICRC attaches great importance to this unique Convention, to the fulfilment of its humanitarian objectives, and to caring for the victims of armed conflict, including those who suffer the appalling effects of anti-personnel mines.

Impressive progress has been made since the Convention entered into force four and a half years ago. Well over two thirds of all States have joined the Convention, and most others have made a political commitment to the total elimination of anti-personnel mines. Parties to the Convention include all but three States in the Americas and all but two Member States of the European Union. It is particularly heartening that in Africa -- which, along with Asia, is the most mine-affected continent -- all but four sub-Saharan nations are now party to the Convention, including one of the most severely mine-affected States in the world, Angola. Over the last year, we have also seen another severely mine-affected State, Afghanistan, and East Timor join 17 other Asian States Parties by acceding to the Convention. The ICRC urges all Asian nations to adhere to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines, and in particular the Asian signatory States -- Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Cook Islands, Marshall Islands and Vanuatu -- to follow through on their commitment to join the Convention and to ratify soon.

But of course, adherence to the treaty is just the first, and indeed the easiest, step. The real test of the Convention's success lies in its impact on the ground. There too, the facts are impressive. Where the Convention is being fully implemented, the annual number of new mine victims has fallen by two-thirds or more. Moreover, earlier this year, the first crucial deadline of the Convention was successfully met by the 45 States which had stockpile destruction deadlines on 1 March. Our understanding is that all other States that have their stockpile destruction deadline in 2003 will successfully meet it. Collectively, States Parties have destroyed over 30 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines. Mine clearance activities are taking place in most of the 45 States Parties that have reported mined areas or are known to be affected by mines. One such State Party, Costa Rica, reported in February of this year that its territory is now completely cleared of mines.

The Convention's achievements would be remarkable at any time and by any standards. In the current international climate, in which many other issues are demanding political attention and resources, they are extraordinary. The success of the Convention stands out against the stagnation and indecisiveness currently witnessed under many other treaty regimes, and in particular, those relating to weapons. It is no exaggeration to say that the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines is living proof of the relevance of international humanitarian law as a basis for arms control and disarmament. It also demonstrates beyond a doubt how human security depends on multilateral dialogue and cooperation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Notwithstanding all these accomplishments, major challenges remain to ensure that all of the promises of the Convention to mine victims and their communities are fulfilled. Although we have begun our journey well, the long road to a mine-free world is fraught with obstacles, the main ones being complacency and lack of resources. If the humanitarian objectives of the Convention are to be successfully met, it is of utmost importance that States Parties reaffirm at the highest level their commitments to the full implementation of the Convention. The First Review Conference next year represents the crucial opportunity in this regard. The year 2004 is the half-way point to the mine clearance deadlines of many States. In order to ensure that these deadlines are respected, it is essential that mobilisation of governments and civil society continue unabated in the five-year period following the Review Conference. We must ensure that, by next year's Review Conference, everything is in place to guarantee a resounding victory over anti-personnel mines in 2009. To this end, specific efforts will be required in the coming year:

- Firstly, all States that still have stockpiled anti-personnel mines should ensure that programs for destruction are in place and on schedule to meet their deadlines.
- Secondly, all mine-affected States should have developed their national plans, and identified their own resources and needs to ensure that mined areas are cleared within the Convention's deadlines.
- Thirdly, other States should have renewed and increased their commitments to international cooperation and assistance, and in particular, to the sustained availability of resources through 2009. It is important to note here and now that completion of mine clearance within the Convention's deadlines will require considerably more resources, both internal and external, than those currently available. We are grateful that Canada and Norway have pledged to maintain existing levels of support for global mine action activities over the next five years. It is our hope that other States will follow suit before the Review Conference.
- Fourthly, States Parties should have reached understandings to ensure that all mines which function as described in Article 2 of the Convention are destroyed, and to resolve other issues where interpretations and practice diverge.
- And last but not least, in the period leading up to the Review Conference and beyond, we hope that greater attention will be paid to responsibilities and commitments regarding victim assistance. Unfortunately, this is still the most challenging field of mine action, in part because effective victim assistance depends on a functioning health care and social services system, which in turn depends on effective post-conflict reconstruction.

The ICRC and the other components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement remain absolutely committed to achieving the Convention's humanitarian objectives and bringing about a mine-free world. As a sign of this commitment, it is expected that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will in December renew its current 5-year *Strategy on Landmines* through 2009, and extend it to cover explosive remnants of war. The ICRC is also renewing its *Special Appeal on Mine Action*, with a view to sustaining its mine action activities from 2004 through 2009. I am also pleased to announce here that the President of the ICRC, Dr. Jakob Kellenberger, will lead the ICRC's delegation to next year's Review Conference.

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The magnitude of the problem in many mine-affected countries remains alarming. In many mine-affected States Parties where the ICRC is working, it will take several decades at current rates of demining before mine clearance is completed. It is therefore crucial that efforts to clear these devices in a timely fashion be increased significantly, bearing in mind that until mine clearance is fully achieved, mine awareness and victim assistance will remain constant needs in affected communities. Until then, the ICRC will continue its work in these key areas of mine action.

This meeting takes place at a critical moment in the life of this Convention. It should look beyond the 2004 Review Conference with a vision of the needs in the following five years -- years which will largely determine the treaty's success. It should invite mine-affected and other States Parties to make clear their plans and commitments so that the Review Conference can take stock of what is still needed to get the job done. And it should launch a preparatory process to ensure that the Review Conference will have high international visibility, and benefit from a high level of government representation commensurate with the importance of the event. The result of our work here, and of a successful Review Conference next year, will be measured in saved lives and limbs in the years that follow. In Ottawa in 1997, governments promised to save those lives and limbs. Our challenge now is to ensure that they do.

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