

**REMARKS BY MRS. MARIA VICTORIA GARCIA DE SANTOS,
HEAD OF THE COLOMBIAN DELEGATION TO THE
V MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION,
STOCKPILING, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND ON
THEIR DESTRUCTION**

Bangkok, Thailand, September 16, 2003

Thank you, Mr. President:

On first place let me express my appreciation to the Government of Thailand for hosting this V Meeting of the States Parties of the Ottawa Convention. We are certain that at the end of this meeting, we would have taken all of the necessary decisions to advance in the full implementation of the Convention.

I would also like to recognize the work done by Ambassador Jean Lint. Thanks to his dedication and skill, we manage to consolidate the necessary consensus to achieve the objectives proposed during his presidency.

During the IV meeting that took place in Geneva, we congratulated ourselves for the significant advances that had taken place in the fight against antipersonnel mines. However, despite the accomplishments registered during the last year, the conditions in the affected countries such as mine, continues to be highly worrying.

Today Colombia is facing a serious humanitarian crisis caused by the indiscriminate use of these terrible artifacts by non-State actors. In fact, 30 out of the 32 departments of my country are affected by this criminal practice.

As of September 1st, 2003 we identified 2,200 minefields, and 2,142 victims have been reported, of which almost half are civilians and of those 50% are children.

Non-State actors have laid these antipersonnel mines on an indiscriminate basis: near schools, water sources, productive farm land and access paths leading to communities, without signalization, demarcation or mapping. Also natural parks and Indian reservations have also been mined.

Additionally, the results of a recent national survey on the knowledge, attitude, practices and believes about antipersonnel mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), shows that 96% of our population does not know that these deadly devices are activated by proximity and contact.

Antipersonnel mines also represent a serious obstacle to economic development and humanitarian activities. In some cases, internally displaced people that have returned to their communities find their land mined. Daily they have to witness how antipersonnel mines kill or injure their countrymen. During this year, Colombia has on average a mine victim a day.

This highlights not only the immediate impact on daily activities of civilian population, but also the risks and implications for humanitarian and development organizations that need to find safe ways to continue their activities.

The Government of Colombia appreciates and encourages the work the "Geneva Call" has been doing in the area of non-State actors, and acknowledges the interest shown by the International Campaign for the Prohibition of Antipersonal Mines, ICBL. Likewise, we would like to highlight yesterday's European Union delegation's remarks addressing its concern for the use of antipersonnel mines by non-State actors.

Our Government of Colombia wants to advance in the State Parties' Declaration during the IV meeting held in Geneva, in which it called non-State actors to cease the production and use of anti-personnel mines and urged them to embrace the humanitarian spirit of the Convention. The Colombian Delegation would like to request the support of all of you to formally include the topic of non-State actors in the agenda of the Intercessional Meetings of the Standing Committee on the General Status and Operation, as well as in the preparatory process for the Review Conference.

My country considers that an open discussion of this topic allows the international community to reach the appropriate formulas for collective action.

It is clear that the Ottawa Convention, in addition to a disarmament treaty, is an International Humanitarian Law instrument. Accordingly it generates obligations to all parties involved in the conflict, including non-State actors.

Colombia has developed a National Mine Action Plan against its National Plan of Action against Antipersonnel Mines and has been working in its implementation. We will continue collecting and verifying and mapping mined areas, and signaling dangerous zones. We have managed to determine the geographical coordinates of 550 mine fields that, with the support of international organizations with expertise in this topic, will be marked in the near future.

Our challenge is also to provide the appropriate assistance to survivors, and to inform and educate to prevent new accidents.

The efforts of the Government will not be enough without the international assistance and cooperation. I would like to specially thank the support given to us by the governments of Switzerland and Canada, the Organization of American States, the agencies of the UN System, the International Migration Organization, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva International Center for the Humanitarian Demining.

Colombia is ready to continue working shoulder to shoulder with the governments, the international organizations and civil society, to continue developing national application measures of the Ottawa Convention..

To close, let me express in the name of civilian and military victims of my country, my appreciation for the support, consideration this initiative receives. I would also like to reiterate our commitment to continue working hard to carry out the fulfillment of all the obligations under the Ottawa Convention.

Thank you