

Fifth Meeting of the States Parties – General Exchange of Views

Statement of Turkey
Delivered by Murat Salim Esenli
Deputy Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of Turkey

17 September 2003
Mr. President,

At the outset on behalf of my delegation, allow me to express my warmest congratulations on your assumption of the Presidency of the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties. I am confident that under your able leadership the meeting will be successfully guided through its challenging agenda. I also assure you of my delegation's full cooperation throughout the proceedings. I also would like to express my delegation's appreciation to the Government of Thailand for hosting this meeting and for its kind hospitality.

Mr. President,

My delegation has aligned itself with the statement made by distinguished representative of Italy on behalf of the European Union and we share the views and objectives expressed in this statement.

I also wish to avail myself of this opportunity to recap Turkey's latest activities regarding antipersonnel landmines (APLs).

Mr. President,

In view of human sufferings and casualties caused by APLs, the international community has long been endeavoring to take effective measures in order to prevent their use. The resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly calling on member states to implement a moratorium on the export of antipersonnel landmines constituted an important part of these efforts since 1993. In light of these resolutions, Turkey unilaterally declared on 17 January 1996 a comprehensive moratorium on all APLs exports and transfers for a renewable term of 3 years. In 1999 Turkey extended the moratorium for a similar period.

Moratoriums on the export of APLs were superceded by the entry into force of the Convention. The security situation around Turkey precluded her from signing the Convention at the time of its conclusion. Nevertheless, as an expression of her commitment to the humanitarian objectives of the Convention and becoming a party to the Convention, we extended our national moratorium on the export and transfer of anti-personnel landmines in January 2002, this time indefinitely. Along these lines, the use of APLs by the Turkish Armed Forces was banned with a directive dated 26 January 1998, due to the changing defensive concept of border areas as well as the enhanced activities related to the prohibition of APLs in the world.

Mr. President,

With her firm commitment to clearing anti-personnel landmines, Turkey has engaged in certain initiatives which are aimed at demining common border areas with neighboring states with a view to avoiding use of such mines in the future. Paragoned to the provisions of the Ottawa Convention and other relevant instruments on APLs, the initiatives taken by Turkey comprise of even more rigorous compliance and verification measures. In this respect, Turkey offered Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia and Azerbaijan to conclude bilateral agreements which would free the common border areas from anti-personnel mines.

The bilateral agreement, which was concluded on 22nd March 1999 with Bulgaria, entered into force on 1st May 2002. In compliance with the provisions of the agreement, demining activity has been finalized and the annual exchange of information for this year has been concluded in April 2003.

The ratification process of the agreement made with Georgia on 29 January 2001 is underway at the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Another mine clearing activity is ongoing around the Armenian border of Turkey. At this region, so far 37,234 square meters of mined area and mines in the vicinity of security installations have been cleared. During these operations a total of 12,774 mines have been cleared. Mine clearing activities in this area are still in progress.

The mine clearance along the Turkish border with Syria is another priority objective of Turkey. Turkish Government, as another sign of firm commitment to fulfill the provisions stipulated by the Convention, has allocated 17 million US Dollars for mine clearance activities along this region alone. Following the completion of mine clearance activity, the land free of mines will be opened for agriculture. By the same token mine clearance along other border areas is also under consideration.

While continuing with the clearance of mines, Turkish Armed Forces have also started the planning of the destruction of the existing APL's in stockpiles according to Article 4 of the Convention. In the planning stage it has been determined that the existing mines in storage can be destroyed within four years. Work on the destruction methods is continuing. Turkey is determined to start the destruction process following her accession to the Convention.

Mr. President,

On the education front Turkey has established two "Demining and Coordination Centers", and in the context of demining activity, formed "Demining Teams" for the Army Command centers in case of need. These "Demining Teams" are each composed of 10-15 trained personnel. The civilian population who lives in close proximity to mined area is given awareness education in order to avoid any mine related accidents.

Turkey, attaching importance to the global humanitarian mine clearance activities, carried out projects in several regions around the world. Turkey also provides courses on mine clearance to foreign armed Forces personnel in the context of "Partnership for Peace" and bilateral agreements and contributes to the mine clearance efforts with personnel, equipment and financial assistance. In that context, Turkey has participated in the mine clearance activities in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and in regions where Turkish troops are acting under the command the KFOR and SFOR. Turkey also provided financial contribution to the NATO PfP Trust Fund for the project in the Ukraine, aimed at the destruction of mines and ammunition remaining from the former Soviet era.

Mr. President,

Turkey, as an observer at the first meeting of the states parties to the Convention in Maputo in May 1999, had announced her intention to become a party to the Convention during the first decade of the new millennium. Turkey also participated in all the meetings of states parties, as well as the Intersessional Meetings of 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 periods. During the last intersessional meeting under the relevant agenda items entitled land mine clearance and stockpile destruction, members of the Turkish General Staff made a comprehensive presentation on activities of the Turkish Armed Forces. During the course of our deliberations, time permitting, Turkish Delegation wishes to provide additional information under the appropriate Articles of the Convention.

Mr. President,

In the field of survivor assistance, Turkish Armed Forces have built and inaugurated a specialized rehabilitation and care center with 300 bed capacity. This center is equipped to provide different types of prosthesis, physical therapy and psychological assistance as well as courses for economic reintegration of the mine victims.

With regards to the current state of Turkey's accession process, I would like to recall that with a joint

statement on April 6, 2001, Turkey and Greece announced their decision to concurrently conclude procedures, which would make both sides parties to the Ottawa Convention. It was also agreed that the instruments of ratification by Greece and accession by Turkey would be simultaneously deposited with the Secretary General of the United Nations in due course. In line with this agreement the appropriate constitutional procedures have been completed in both countries. The two Foreign Ministers confirmed this commitment through a joint statement in Kas Turkey, on 3rd May, 2003. The two countries will proceed to submit simultaneously their respective instruments to the UN Secretary General, hopefully, before the end of this year.

Along with the process of finalizing the accession to the Ottawa Convention, Turkey has also reached final stages of ratifying the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW) and its annexed Protocol I, Amended Protocol II and Protocol IV.

Mr. President,

At this juncture, I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to Ambassador Lint of Belgium for his unwavering support throughout his tenure. In this regard, I also wish to thank the co-chairs, all the delegations as well as the International Campaign to Ban Landmines for their constant encouragement and cooperation during this process. We sincerely hope that with Turkey's accession to the Ottawa Convention, the efforts aimed at demining our region in particular, and the world in general, would gain a new impetus and vigor.

Mr. President, before concluding my remarks, I would also like to express our hope and expectation that the outcome of this meeting will further contribute to the common objectives of the international community to rid the world from the APLs by the deadline set in the Convention and to provide the necessary assistance to landmine victims who have been maimed by this scourge.

Thank you Mr. President.