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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

Geneva, Switzerland
24 – 28 November 2008

STATEMENT BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON EUROPEAN COMMUNITY CO-OPERATION AND ASSISTANCE TO MINE ACTION

Mr. Chairman, Co-Chairs, Distinguished Delegates,

The Ninth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention is the last occasion to adopt concrete measures to meet the challenges and remove the stalemates in the universalisation and implementation of the Ottawa Convention before next year's Review Conference. The Second Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention in 2009 will evaluate the progress decided this week. States Parties and donors will need to act promptly and effectively to meet these challenges. In preparation for this 2009 Review Conference the European Commission has begun an internal review of the EC contribution to mine action worldwide. And we have taken a number of steps to improve our contribution as a donor to the objectives of the Convention. Our main focus has been on approaching the "zero-victim target", which has been the *leitmotiv* of the European Union's mine action policy since 2005.

In practice, in addition to extensive support to mine-affected countries worldwide, this has meant a series of measures to enhance the effectiveness of the EC's contribution to mine action worldwide:

- Producing a set of guidelines on effective linkage of mine action with development for future programming of EC mine action from 2008 to 2013.

- Undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of mine action funded by the European Commission under its previous Mine Action Strategy 2005-2007;
- Commissioning a series of studies to improve donorship, summarised in a booklet with advice for other donors on setting up and running mine action programmes;

The most important outcome of the internal review of EC mine action is a set of internal *Guidelines on European Community Mine Action 2008-2013*¹. These guidelines arise from efforts devoted to the integration of mine action into EC development policies. The guidelines are a conscious response to *the Dead Sea Progress Report* call to “promote guidelines on how to more effectively link mine action with development”. Their aim is threefold. First, to ensure valid follow-up to the previous *EC Mine Action Strategy 2005-2007* by steering EC delegations in mine-affected countries towards effective mine action programming. Second, to provide a basis for synergy within the peace, security and development cooperation nexus. Third, to encourage the integration of the principles of partnership and ownership already underlying EC development cooperation into all forms of intervention, in particular mine action.

Importantly, a comprehensive evaluation of European Commission-funded mine action covering the period 2005-2007 is currently being conducted in order to generate useful lessons for decision-makers within the EC and to improve the planning and management of existing and future mine action projects, programmes and policies. This evaluation, carried out by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, comprises a series of regional evaluations which provide objective assessments of EC-funded mine action in six regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Caucasus and Central Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. The regional evaluations will feed into a final report which, besides providing an overview of EC mine action support to each specific region, will present recommendations to guide EC staff in the design and management of future mine action programmes and projects. Primarily conceived for EU institutions’ and EU Member States’ use, the recommendations and lessons learned will be available to all interested mine action stakeholders as soon as they are finalised early next year.

¹ The Commission Staff Working Paper: *Guidelines on European Community Mine Action 2008-2013* can be found on the External Relations website of the European Commission at the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/mine/news/index.htm

In addition to these internal measures, a third initiative has been the production of a series of studies commissioned to provide new and established donors with practical guidance on successful establishment and management of a mine action project from its inception until conclusion. These studies culminated in a booklet *Advice for Donors on Setting up and Running mine action programmes*, which the European Commission is happy to share with all interested actors.²

Mr Chairman,

As you see, the Commission has been trying hard to rise to the Dead Sea challenges, and I assure you that we will continue to do our best to contribute to the preparations for a valuable Review Conference next year.

Mr Chairman,

The implementation of the Ottawa Convention to date is mixed. The European Commission is particularly concerned with the rising number of States Parties unable to meet the Convention's deadlines. Fifteen extension requests under Article 5 have been officially submitted. We are obliged to conclude therefore that many States are not in a position to fulfil their obligations to destroy stocks or clear mined areas under their control by 2009. It is towards these countries that donors' efforts, including the EC's, have concentrated in past years.

At the same time, we are witnessing a decline in spending on mine action programmes as budgets shrink and priorities change. Importantly, however, removing landmines is not always the first priority for countries receiving assistance from the European Commission and other international donors. As for the European Commission, through our delegations in mine-affected countries, while we shall work to enhance the principle of ownership of the landmine problem in our partner countries, we will carefully assess national commitment and efforts undertaken by affected countries in the fight against mines before providing further assistance. It is a practical way to achieve the aims of all states parties here today, as is the Joint Action on Universalisation of the Ottawa Convention, announced by the Presidency of the European Union

² The booklet can be downloaded from the following link:
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/mine/news/index.htm

earlier this week. Both demonstrate how committed the EU member states and the Commission are to the universalisation and effective implementation of the Convention.

Mr Chairman,

At this point, please allow me to give a brief up-date on the European Community's assistance to mine action in 2008. Since the beginning of 2008, the European Community has supported mine action for a total exceeding 27 million Euros³ in Albania, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Georgia, Laos, Lebanon, Nepal, Serbia and Sri Lanka. In addition, projects launched in 2007 have continued⁴. This assistance to over twenty mine-affected countries in the current budgetary period is evidence of our commitment.

Mr Chairman,

In closing, the Commission believes that through effective implementation of the new Guidelines, the European Commission will ensure our action is better tailored to support truly committed affected States to face their remaining challenges.

So, in sum, Mr Chairman, the European Commission would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to assist countries and peoples whose daily lives suffer from the presence of landmines, explosive remnants of war and unexploded ordnance. Our efforts in support of the Ottawa Convention will therefore be coupled by support of the new Convention on Cluster Munitions. Reducing the socio-economic impact of mines and other weapons on victims of conflict in many regions across the world remains a key element of the European Community's development policy and its mine action.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

³ This figure is merely indicative. It represents the current estimates for EC support to mine action in 2008. Given the fact that financial commitments are made by the European Commission towards the end of the year, the overall EC funding to mine action in 2008 will exceed 27 million euros.

⁴ EC Mine action projects launched in 2007 are being implemented in the following countries: Afghanistan, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan, Lebanon, Burma/Myanmar, Nepal, Russia (Chechnya), Senegal, Sudan and Sri Lanka.