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Sixth Meeting of the States Parties

From Geneva to Zagreb: 1000 km by Bike Against Landmines: Cyclist Armin Köhli Meets Bold Challenge

After an extremely challenging 7-day bicycle adventure, journalist and cyclist champion Armin Köhli, double leg amputee, arrived in Zagreb on 30 November 2005, having covered more than 1000 km.

After leaving Geneva on 24 November, Armin Köhli crossed the French side of Lake Geneva, Valais, Northern Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, cycling at a rate of about 160 km a day despite almost unbearable weather conditions, such as heavy snowfall, rain and icy wind.

On his arrival in Zagreb, he was received by Swiss and Croatian authorities, conference participants and members of various humanitarian NGOs, all of whom were gathered in Croatia for the Sixth Meeting of the States parties to the Ottawa Convention. On the occasion of this welcome ceremony, the car that had followed Armin Köhli during his adventure, a car adapted for hands-only driving, was donated by a Swiss disabled, Mrs. Krusi, to a mine survivor, a Croatian deminer, Mr. Safet Kegic.

With this achievement, Armin Köhli sought to raise public awareness through the media about the fight against anti-personnel mines and the importance of offering appropriate assistance to the victims of these weapons. The project was jointly organized with the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines. [For more information on Armin Köhli: www.tourdarmin.ch]

Workshop: Mine Action in the Midst of Internal Conflict

Most research shows that the use of anti-personnel mines is very high within armed groups, mines being "the weapon of the poor", cheap and easy to manufacture without external assistance. Local populations suffer particularly from the presence of mines or Improvised Explosive Devices in internal conflicts. It is thus essential that measures be taken, commencing during the conflict, in order to prevent innocent civilians from becoming victims of these weapons. Establishing programs of mine action activities (demining programs, victim assistance, Mine Risk Education) involves many difficulties.

On the occasion of the Sixth Meeting of the States Parties, Geneva Call, in collaboration with the Non-State Actors Working Group of the ICBL, organised a workshop on mine action in the midst of internal conflict. Building on three case studies, this workshop was a unique occasion to share experiences on the difficulties, challenges and successes of mine action in a situation of internal conflict; to find ways to improve the possibilities of mine activities in the midst of an internal conflict and to listen to representatives of states confronted with such a situation.

The meeting was chaired by Ambassador Jean Lint, President of the Fourth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention and opened by Mrs. Diana Plestina, Advisor to the Minister for Mine Action, Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Throughout, participants highlighted the difficulties of launching and conducting mine activities in the midst of an internal conflict; worked to convince states about the necessity to facilitate and support such activities; and defined guidelines and recommendations depending on the typology of both the conflict and the armed group. The report will be available soon on Geneva Call's website.

Programmes

AFRICA

Somalia: Somali Leader Hands over Stockpile of Landmines for Destruction

On 24 October 2005, Eng. Hussein Mohamed Aideed, Chairman of the United Somali Congress/Somali National Alliance (USC/SNA) and Deputy Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, decided to hand over to Geneva Call all stockpiles under his control (approximately 3'500 anti-personnel and anti-tank mines).

During a Geneva Call mission to Mogadishu, Mr. Aideed, along with other signatory leaders, demonstrated full cooperation and gave Geneva Call access to his stockpiles. He reiterated his commitment to destroy the stockpiles and called for technical assistance. Stockpile destruction is a key obligation under the "Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action" (Deed of Commitment).

Geneva Call is currently liaising with UNDP and Danish Demining Group to proceed with stockpile destruction. Additionally, if funding permits, similar operations are expected to be replicated in other regions. Geneva Call believes it is imperative to build on the current momentum and take action. Destroying stockpiles will prevent new mine use and support the peace and reconstruction process.



Photo: Somali stockpiles - awaiting destruction

South Sudan: Mine Ban Education in South Sudan

In collaboration with Geneva Call and the Kenya Coalition Against Landmines (KCAL), the New Sudan Mine Action Directorate organised a regional mine ban education workshop. The workshop is the follow up of a strategic conference on the implementation of the Deed of Commitment organised in 2003 by Geneva Call and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) - signatory of the Deed of Commitment - in New Site, South Sudan.

The workshop took place in Rumbek, Lake Region, from 27 to 29 July 2005. It was opened by Governor Pagan Amum and brought together about 40 selected SPLM/A military commanders, community leaders and representatives of the civil authority. Representatives of the UN Mine Action Service in Sudan, local mine action NGOs, Landmine Monitor and the Sudan Campaign to

Ban Landmines facilitated discussions. The participation of the northern-based Sudan Campaign was particularly significant as it offered them the opportunity, for the first time, to meet with local NGOs in the south and to strategise about how to partner with them in the campaign.

The workshop provided information on the mine ban and current efforts to address the landmine scourge in Sudan. At the end of the workshop participants committed to co-operating in mine action and to disseminate the mine ban messages within their own constituencies.

A second workshop was expected to take place immediately after in Yei, Equatoria region, but was cancelled due to the tragic death of Dr John Garang, SPLM/A Chairman and newly appointed First Vice-President of the Government of National Unity.



Western Sahara: The Polisario Front Commits to Banning Anti-Personnel Mines

On 3 November, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario Front) signed Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment in Geneva.

The signature "reflects the will of the Polisario to actively participate in eradicating the landmine scourge and to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Given the current deadlock in the peace process and the threat of renewed hostilities, this decision from the Polisario Front to unilaterally renounce the use of anti-personnel mines is a significant gesture" commented Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey, President of Geneva Call. During the ceremony, the Polisario Front announced that it will promptly destroy the stockpiles in its possession and called on Morocco to join the Mine Ban Treaty. Morocco is one of the last remaining four countries in Africa to yet accede to the treaty.

The Polisario delegation was led by Mohamed Lamine Bouhali, Minister of Defence, and included M'hamed Khadad, Coordinator with the UN, Mohamed Sidati, Minister for Europe, and Senia Ahmed, Representative for Switzerland. A number of diplomatic missions and international organizations also attended the event.

The signing ceremony follows high level meetings that took place during Geneva Call's mission to Western Sahara in June 2005, notably with Mohamed Abdelaziz, Polisario Front's Secretary General and the President of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (as recognised by the African Union and over 70 states). The Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines actively contributed to the engagement process.

ASIA

Philippines: Training of Trainers with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

At the request of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a signatory group, Geneva Call organised a Training of Trainers programme on International Humanitarian Law, human rights law, child protection issues and the Antipersonnel mine ban in November 2005. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies and the Coalition against the Use of Child Soldiers collaborated in the training. In all, 60 members of the MILF were trained to pass this information on to other members.

This endeavour is significant in that it builds the capacity of the MILF to train itself on these issues and at the same time gives the group an opportunity to further internalise these norms. This is the first time that Geneva Call has organised a training of this magnitude. The training is also a concrete expression of Geneva Call's goal to help facilitate dialogue between signatory groups and other humanitarian actors on issues that go beyond the mine ban. In this way, the Deed of Commitment can become truly the first step towards acceptance of other humanitarian and human rights norms.



Sri Lanka: Creating a Positive Environment for the Mine Ban

In May 2005, Geneva Call organised a workshop in Paris on mine action that brought together activists from the European Tamil Diaspora. The workshop, co-organised with the Centre for Just Peace and Democracy (CJPD), was organised with the full cooperation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

The workshop provided an opportunity to address certain concerns that the Tamil Diaspora had, specifically with regards to the mine ban, such as the reason for using the term non-State actor (NSA) and the question of whether the mine ban was a disarmament issue. The workshop was successful in raising the awareness of the Diaspora on the landmine issue and in generating interest in becoming actively involved in mine action.

In agreement with the LTTE, Geneva Call and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) have jointly planned a series of workshops in 2006 for LTTE military and political leadership. The objectives are to share their perspectives with civil society and the mine action community, to explore the limited military utility of AP mines versus their humanitarian impact and to provide an opportunity to explore alternatives to AP mine use.

COLOMBIA

Geneva Call Attends Peace Talks between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Government of Colombia

Throughout 2005 Geneva Call continued direct dialogue with the ELN and indirect dialogue with other Colombian NSAs, with the collaboration of the Colombian Campaign against landmines. Geneva Call assisted in the hosting of several meetings with the ELN's spokesperson, Mr. Francisco Galan, who is currently conducting popular consultancies on the subject of the peace process between the ELN and the Colombian Government. Geneva Call welcomed the opening of peace talks between ELN and the Government of Colombia in Havana last December. Geneva Call was invited by the ELN and "la Casa de Paz" - an organization devoted to advancing the dialogue between the ELN and Colombian civil society - to accompany the ELN during the negotiations and to meet their chief negotiator and military chief Antonio Garcia.

Geneva Call is the only international organization involved in this process. The presence of the organization aimed not at discussing political

issues, but rather at trying to make sure that various humanitarian concerns would be included in the talks and in any possible future peace agreement. During the first round of the peace negotiations, Geneva Call was asked to help in creating a humanitarian agreement that would include anti-personnel landmines. In the course of the meetings the ELN chief negotiator, Antonio Garcia, requested Geneva Call's permanent attendance at the peace process, expressing ELN's interest in the creation of a humanitarian agreement on landmines. He also communicated to Geneva Call that after the sensitization carried out by the organization, the ELN will adopt a new policy in mine use that would reduce considerably the humanitarian impact of mines.

Colombian government representatives also expressed satisfaction regarding Geneva Call's dialogue with the ELN on the mine issue.



Photo: Geneva Call accompanies peace process between Colombian Government and ELN. Press Conference 12 December 2006 Medellin

Forums with Affected Communities

Geneva Call successfully organized four regional forums conducted in the second part of the year on "*Landmines, NSAs and Humanitarian Agreement*". The forums took place in four mine affected departments at Aquitania, Cali, Santa Marta and Popayan. Participants included not only members of the communities, but also authorities, personalities and media representatives. Although the major themes of the topics proposed were the same, different subjects were developed during each forum through interactive discussions about each locality's particular problems. These included: the social and economic impact of landmines; the links between landmines and internal forced displacement (mostly suffered by indigenous communities); etc. During the concluding sessions, recommendations were often addressed to the Colombian armed NSAs and to departmental and national authorities, including the request to NSAs to cease the use of AP landmines.

Interdepartmental Conference on the Colombian conflict

Towards the end of August 2005, Geneva Call was invited to the international meeting of the social organisations of South-West of Colombia, in Cali, where the socio-economic and humanitarian impact of the internal armed conflict was discussed. Geneva Call opened a discussion on the landmine issue through the screening of a 15 minutes film to more than 500 participants and the hosting of a debate. Among participants there were several personalities, including two former Presidents of Colombia, the advisor to Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, Governors, UNHCHR, ICRC, Swiss Embassy personnel, etc. and hundreds of social and human rights organisations and local community representatives (including from several mine affected communities).

Projects

Child Soldiers Project: Geneva Call Studies the Feasibility of Extending its Approach

In 2004 Geneva Call convened a meeting of signatories to the Deed of Commitment in order to discuss a number of issues relating to the implementation and monitoring of commitments. This meeting was also the opportunity to share thoughts on the value of extending Geneva Call's approach to other humanitarian issues, such as child recruitment, torture and the prohibition of indiscriminate weapons other than anti-personnel landmines. A majority of those present agreed that Geneva Call should share its experience and expertise with other organisations and further explore to what extent its approach could be applied to other humanitarian norms.

In part as a result of this consultation, Geneva Call was requested to conduct a study on child soldiers. The overall objective of this study is to assess the relevance of the elaboration of a Deed of Commitment around the issue of child recruitment. These findings will not only guide Geneva Call's future work, they will also feed into the research phase of a three-year project on armed opposition groups and child recruitment initiated by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Coalition).

Recent examples of collaboration between the two organisations, notably in Burundi and the Philippines, evidence the fact that there is a place for Geneva Call in the fight against child recruitment. The boundaries of that place and the precise direction Geneva Call should take in the future are some of the issues that the current study on child soldiers will tackle.

Female Combatants Project: Extending the Project to Sub-Saharan Africa

In August 2004, Geneva Call launched its Programme on Female Combatants as a means of engaging with female combatants and ex-combatants from armed NSAs to explore their experiences as active participants in conflict and their particular agency as a group to promote humanitarian norms in conflict.

2005 saw the expansion of the programme with a conference for the region of sub-Saharan African. From the 23 to 26 November, nearly 40 women combatants or former combatants came together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The women were drawn from more than 30 armed opposition groups, from some 13 African countries currently or recently involved in armed conflict.

Four small-group workshops ran through 3 days of the conference on the following topics: humanitarian law, human rights law, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and transition into governance roles. Throughout each workshop and additional plenary sessions, participants emphasised the importance of advocacy, networking nationally and regionally, information sharing, capacity building, and training to strengthen women's leadership abilities to help them gain a greater voice in each of the four areas. A final workshop report will be available on the Geneva Call website by March 2006.

First Meeting of Signatories to Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment

Report Available on Geneva Call's Website at:

<http://www.genevacall.org/resources/testi-publications/gc-nsa-report-05.pdf>

Armed Non-State Actors and Landmines: New Report Available

On the occasion of the 6th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty in Zagreb, Croatia, Geneva Call launched its new report: "Armed Non-State Actors and Landmines. Volume I: A Global Report Profiling NSAs and their Use, Acquisition, Production, Transfer and Stockpiling of Landmines". The report builds on an initial analysis published in 2004. It provides a comprehensive mapping of the use, acquisition, production, transfer, and stockpiling of landmines by NSAs, through a presentation of individual group profiles and a global analysis.

This report is now available online on Geneva Call's website at: <http://www.genevacall.org/home.htm>
Paper copies can be obtained by writing to: info@genevacall.org
CD-ROMs will be available shortly.



Abstract

The Global Report has recorded occurrences of AP and anti-vehicle mine planting by NSAs, whether activated by victims, vehicles or at a distance by command-detonation. Around 60 NSAs have deployed landmines in 24 countries in five geographic regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. In addition to these NSAs, groups that were difficult to classify or identify made frequent use of landmines in a few other countries. Over 40 groups made use of some type of victim-activated devices. The mines employed were both factory-made and handmade, indicating involvement in both the transfer and the production of mines.

One of the main findings of this report is that there is a need to discuss the mine issue not only with states, but also with NSAs. Many NSAs (as well as states) lack the long-term perspective of the consequences of mine use, and it is therefore crucial for the international community to find channels of communication with NSAs on the AP mine issue. This report argues that only by understanding NSA and region specific dynamics is it possible to address the - current and future - landmine problem as it relates to NSAs.

Internship with Geneva Call: A Personal Experience

Geneva Call fills an integral function in the international struggle against landmines; this I've learnt since beginning my internship in June 2005. As research assistant, I've been helping to compile a report on mine use by non-state actors around the world. This has not been easy as information is often scarce and unreliable. Even so, I've been impressed by what I've learnt from my research, and by sitting at the heart of Geneva Call's offices where its staff have always taken time to explain the workings of the organisation, its successes and its failures. I can now appreciate what Geneva Call does, and why this job has to be done. I've begun to see how the horror of anti-personnel mines placed by national armies is only one aspect of a problem in which rebels, in the name of a variety of causes, deploy these "infernal machines".

Sometimes such groups claim that they do not seek to harm the people of a contested territory, other times civilian casualties are taken to be an unfortunate but unavoidable corollary of landmine use, whereas others use these weapons with the express purposes of sowing fear in, and controlling the people of a country. I can now see that Geneva Call offers the willing amongst these groups the chance of doing away with anti-personnel mines, of harmonising their military tactics with international humanitarian standards through a process that is traditionally understood to be reserved to States, and of improving the quality of life of those civilians in whose name the insurgents often speak.

In pursuit of this message, I've seen a small team of very dedicated people work hard and efficiently. I often think how similar Geneva Call's office is in some ways to other places I've worked in – excessive coffee drinking, photocopying, computer problems. But, here, it's different; everyone has a purpose and is ultimately working towards goals that, if achieved, will actually save lives and help people far away from the shores of lake Geneva. I have taken on board this message and it has motivated me throughout the internship. I have wanted to contribute (albeit in a very small way) to Geneva Call's work and I thank them for giving me the opportunity to do this.

Matt Pountney



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