

GENEVA CALL NEWSLETTER



GENEVA CALL
APPEL DE GENÈVE
LLAMAMIENTO DE GINEBRA

This Newsletter highlights Geneva Call's main activities since the latest one published in June 2007. It principally describes its engagement in the field.

I. Geneva Call Activities

1. Somalia: Puntland Authorities Grant Unprecedented Access to their Stockpiles, Request International Assistance for Mine Action

In July-August 2007, Geneva Call visited the Puntland authorities, a signatory to the *Deed of Commitment*, in order to address allegations of anti-personnel (AP) mine acquisition from Ethiopia issued by the United Nations Monitoring Group on violations of the arms embargo in Somalia. The Puntland authorities denied the allegations and as an act of good faith, provided Geneva Call with unprecedented access to their military stockpiles in Garowe and Galkayo. No AP mines were found except a small number that Puntland had disclosed to Geneva Call in an earlier mission in 2004.

In addition, the Puntland authorities reiterated their commitment to destroy their stocks of mines and other explosive ordnance and requested the necessary technical assistance. Geneva Call is currently in discussion with international demining non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to explore possible ways to provide support for this pledge.

For more details, please see:

<http://www.genevacall.org/news/testi-press-releases/gc-30sep07-puntland.htm>

2. Western Sahara: Discussion on Mine Action

Geneva Call has promoted the inclusion of mine action discussions in the UN-sponsored talks on the Western Sahara between Morocco and the Polisario Front. The second round recently took place in the United States in August 2007. Mine action was proposed for discussion as a confidence-building measure between the parties but Morocco reportedly rejected it. The Polisario Front signed the Geneva Call's *Deed of Commitment* in 2005. Morocco is not yet a party to the Mine Ban Treaty.

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Photo: Puntland's military stockpiles, Galkayo, Somalia, July 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

3. South Caucasus: Strengthening the Local Ownership of Civil Society with Regard to the Landmine Issue

Since the beginning of the South Caucasus programme in September 2006, Geneva Call has conducted eight local workshops on the landmine issue in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as well as in the Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Tskhinvali regions. More than 80 participants from civil society, international organizations, and media agencies have attended these seminars.

After a discussion of the landmine problem with the *de facto* authorities of South Ossetia in February and April 2007, Geneva Call met with NGOs in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, at the end of June 2007. The representatives of civil society highlighted that from their point of view it is absolutely necessary that any step to solve the humanitarian problem caused by landmines should be agreed upon by both sides of the conflict. The NGO representatives strongly suggested that Geneva Call should conduct a workshop on the landmine issue in the part of South Ossetia that is presently under the control of the Georgian government.

Consequently, Geneva Call met with NGOs in Pkvenisi, a Georgian controlled village in the Tskhinvali region at the end of August 2007. The participants appreciated the suggestion from NGOs in Tskhinvali to conduct a workshop on the landmine issue in their region and emphasized that they would be pleased to have a chance to exchange their views and experiences with people from the other side of the conflict.

In August 2007, Geneva Call visited Abkhazia and met with representatives of local NGOs in Sukhumi, including media, youth, disabled, and landmine related organizations. The discussion focused on how to best address the needs of landmine survivors and how to advocate a comprehensive legal framework on the use of such weaponry. The key question was what can practically be done in regard to landmines under the circumstances of the ongoing conflict with Georgia. Geneva Call also met with the *de facto* authorities of Abkhazia to discuss similar issues.

In October 2007, Geneva Call met with civil society organizations and the *de facto* authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh to discuss the preparation of the planned regional workshop, "Towards an Anti-personnel Mine Free South Caucasus," which will take place in Kiev, 26-27 November. This workshop will gather civil society organizations from the South Caucasus region to share information and experiences in regard to landmines in the region. They will also work on recommendations in the hope of finding a solution to this destructive problem.



Photo: Mammadov Habil from Tovuz, Azerbaijan, father of three children, stepped on a mine in 1994. In 2006 he has applied successfully for a micro-credit to buy cows for breeding, 2006
Credit: Hafiz Safikhanov

4. The Philippines: Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces Roundtable Discussion

Geneva Call participated in the first Armed Forces of the Philippines - Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (Armed Wing of the Moro Islamic Front (MILF)) - Roundtable Discussion. This meeting was held in Mindanao in June 2007 at the invitation of the International Monitoring Team (IMT), which observes the ceasefire between the feuding parties. The emphasis of this discussion was the primacy of the peace process, the role of the IMT, the importance of ceasefire mechanisms, and the need to communicate efficiently on urgent issues.

Geneva Call was the only international NGO present at the roundtable discussion. The invitation came as recognition of the perceived role that Geneva Call has played in contributing to the peace building process in Mindanao. The MILF was one of the first signatories to the *Deed of Commitment* and Geneva Call continues to monitor and support the MILF's implementation of its obligations therein.

5. Sri Lanka: Seminar for Media Reporting on Landmine & Humanitarian Issues

In July 2007, a seminar on "Media Reporting on Landmine & Humanitarian Issues" was organized by the Landmine Ban Advocacy Forum and the Sri Lanka Press Institute, with the support of Geneva Call. Around 45 journalists and editors of the Tamil, Sinhalese and English speaking media attended the seminar, which took place in Colombo. Several other media agencies also covered the event.

The context of the seminar was the very poor journalism taking place on the landmine issue during the conflict escalation over the previous 18 months. There was a general confusion about the normative standards that apply to the forms of weaponry that are known as 'mines.' Moreover, there had been instances when mine clearance agencies had faced difficulties, often as a result of a lack of understanding as to their role. It was anticipated that a clear presentation about mines and mine action would lead to improved reporting on the issue.

Because the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam had not signed the *Ottawa Treaty* and the *Deed of Commitment* respectively, the journalists covering the issue were made aware of limitations in the current normative framework and the need to move to a full mine ban. The questions raised by participants showed a keen interest on the subject, and suggested general support for a ban, though there were clear concerns as to how this could be achieved in the current context.



Photo: Participants at the Media Seminar in Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

6. Colombia: Working towards Humanitarian Agreements on Landmines

During a visit to Colombia in August 2007, Geneva Call's President encouraged both the Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN from *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*) to not wait for a final peace agreement to take place, but rather to immediately attend to the humanitarian crisis caused by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the country. Such joint humanitarian action should start with a humanitarian agreement for the municipality of Samaniego, Nariño.

In late 2006, both parties (the ELN in October and the government in December) had agreed to treat Samaniego as a priority due to its disproportional landmines scourge. Despite these commitments the number of new victims has been steadily increasing.

Geneva Call reiterated this solicitude in a letter to the parties dated 21 August, which stated:

"We are aware of the difficulties and the complexity of a peace process. Nevertheless, Geneva Call has committed its word to the community of Samaniego to transfer its request and hope to the negotiation table in La Havana and pleads you to make all possible efforts to make sure that a Basic Agreement that the country is awaiting will be signed. If this is the case we trust that the landmine problem will be included.

If finalizing the construction of a Basic Agreement and signing it requires more time, we solicit a humanitarian agreement on demining in Samaniego to attend to the current emergency. Another victim pro week is too much."

The need for humanitarian agreements with NSAs in Colombia in order to facilitate comprehensive activities of mine risk education and demining (and other clearance-related activities) was particularly highlighted by the participants at an International Campaign to Ban Landmines workshop in Bogotá on 29 June. Participants at this workshop were chiefly national NGO representatives and UN agencies focussing on mine action in the country.

As of late October both the Basic Agreement and a humanitarian agreement have yet to be signed. Geneva Call takes this opportunity to again appeal to the parties and to other concerned actors to swiftly take measures to protect the civilian population from the consequences of landmines and UXO, starting with the population of Samaniego.



Photo: Mine victims in Samaniego during a meeting with the local authorities, Geneva Call and the CCCM, August 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

II. Additional Mines Destroyed in Iraqi Kurdistan

On 13 September 2007, 600 AP mines "valmaras", 1'900 shells, 9 mortar shells, and a number of other UXO and mines were destroyed by HAW PAR, an organization operating in the mountainous areas in Iraqi Kurdistan, where the Kurdistan People's Congress (Kongra Gel)/People's Defence Forces (HPG) is operating. This act is in accordance with the Kongra Gel/HPG's obligations of the Geneva Call *Deed of Commitment*.



Photo: Mines cleared by HAW PAR, September 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

III. Latest Publication from Geneva Call

"Armed Non-State Actors: Their Contribution to Solving the Landmine Problem"

Journal of Mine Action 11.1 (2007).

Available at: <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/11.1/notes/sjoberg/sjoberg.htm>

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