

GENEVA CALL NEWSLETTER



GENEVA CALL
APPEL DE GENÈVE
LLAMAMIENTO DE GINEBRA

This Newsletter is the first for 2008 and summarizes Geneva Call's main activities from late October 2007 to February 2008.

I. Geneva Call Activities

1. Somaliland on the Way to Adopt Legislation Banning Anti-Personnel Mines

From 27 to 29 October 2007, Geneva Call, in collaboration with the Institute for Practical Research and Training (IPRT) and the Somaliland Mine Action Center (SMAC) held a workshop in Hargeisa with members of the Somaliland Parliament to pave the way towards the adoption of mine ban legislation. The workshop brought together approximately 50 people from the House of Representatives, the House of Elders, the governing authorities and a wide variety of mine action stakeholders. Somaliland authorities have repeatedly expressed interest in adhering to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty but cannot do so, so long as the international community does not recognize Somaliland as an independent State. In 1999, the House of Representatives of Somaliland passed a non-binding resolution calling for the elimination of anti-personnel (AP) mines. However, no formal measures have been taken yet to prohibit use, possession and transfer of these weapons. The workshop provided an opportunity to discuss in detail the content of the draft legislation prepared by Geneva Call, SMAC and IPRT, in consultation with expert organizations. The draft bill is now being finalized by the House of Representatives Sub-Committee for Internal Affairs and Security before consideration by the full House.

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Photo: Ahmed Yusuf Yasin, Somaliland Vice President and head of the mine action authority, opens the workshop, Hargeisa, October 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

2. Iran: The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan Commits to Banning Anti-Personnel Mines

On 5 December 2007, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) committed to a total ban on AP mines by signing the *Deed of Commitment* in the City Hall of Geneva.

“The signature, just on the 10th Anniversary of the Ottawa Convention, is the proof of the engagement of the PDKI to respect international humanitarian law and to protect civilians”, commented Elisabeth Decrey Warner, Geneva Call President.

The PDKI calls on the other armed opposition groups to also ban the use of AP mines and to cooperate in mine action. The PDKI is the first Iranian, and 35th armed non-State actor (NSA) to commit to the principles embodied in the *Deed of Commitment*. Iran is not a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty.

3. Civil society organizations from the South Caucasus region agreed to create a regional NGO consortium on the landmine issue

On 26-27 November 2007, Geneva Call organized the first regional workshop “Towards a Anti-Personnel Mine-Free South Caucasus” in Kiev. 25 representatives of civil society organizations and media agencies from the South Caucasus participated in this workshop to explore their common humanitarian concerns in order to solve the problem for civilians created by landmines and to avoid future landmine victims. They were joined by members of international NGOs and intergovernmental organizations as well as representatives of the European Commission, Germany, Switzerland, Lithuania and the United Kingdom. Also, representatives of the *de facto* authorities in Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia attended the meeting as observers and presented papers giving their respective positions on the landmine issue. Most importantly civil society organizations agreed to create a regional NGO consortium in order to look for better coordination and collaboration on a regional level, bypassing the tensions between the parties to the various conflicts. The final declaration of the regional workshop is available at: <http://www.genevacall.org/news/testi-press-releases/gc-18dec07-caucasus.htm>

Immediately after the workshop, representatives of civil society organizations from the “frozen conflict” regions in the South Caucasus participated in a three-day training. This event enabled them to conduct a survey on the socio-economic needs of landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities in the conflict zones. Civil society organizations from both sides of the conflicts agreed to work together in this common project.



Photo: Signing of the *Deed of Commitment* by PDKI Secretary General Mustafa Hijri, Geneva, December 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

II. Research

1. Armed Non-State Actors and Landmines Volume III: Towards a Holistic Approach to Armed Non-State Actors?

On 14 November 2007 Geneva Call launched a new report on engagement with NSAs at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (HEID), Geneva. This third volume of the multi-agency research project “Armed Non-State Actors and Landmines” discusses the findings and lessons learned from the project within the broader context of NSA engagement, in particular for the human security issues of child combatants and small arms.

At the launch, panellists from the Swiss government, the Geneva International Academic Network, HEID and Geneva Call presented different aspects of the project and NSA engagement.

The launch marked the end of a joint research project with the Program for the Study of International Organization(s) of the HEID, initiated in 2005. Other institutions contributing to the project were UNMAS, the GICHD, the University of Geneva and the HEID *per se*.

The report can be downloaded from: <http://www.genevacall.org/resources/publications.htm>
Hardcopies can be obtained by writing to: info@genevacall.org



Photo: Launch of the report “Towards a Holistic Approach to Armed Non-State Actors?”, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, November 2007
Credit: Geneva Call

2. A Review of Geneva Call's Action 2000-2007

In November, Geneva Call released a comprehensive review of the work it has carried out with its partners during the past seven years to advocate the mine ban among NSAs. The review *Engaging Armed Non-State Actors in a Landmine Ban: The Geneva Call's Progress Report (2000-2007)*, which builds upon an internal assessment and research efforts, documents the progress accomplished to date and the remaining challenges. It also provides recommendations on the way forward, in an effort to further enhance the effectiveness of future NSA engagement work.

Since the launch of Geneva Call in 2000, significant progress has been made in engaging NSAs in the landmine ban. 35 armed groups from Burma/Myanmar, Burundi, India, Iran, Iraq, the Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey and Western Sahara have signed the *Deed of Commitment*. Signatory groups have by and large abided by its terms, refraining from using AP mines and cooperating in mine action with specialized organizations. In addition, nine other NSAs have pledged to prohibit or limit the use of AP mines, either unilaterally or through a ceasefire agreement with the government. In some countries, the signing of the *Deed of Commitment* by NSAs facilitated the launch of much-needed humanitarian mine action programs in areas under their control, as well as the accession to the Ottawa Convention by their respective States. Of course, many challenges remain, notably the continued use of AP mines by non-signatory groups, the lack of technical and financial resources to support implementation of the *Deed of Commitment* and insufficient cooperation from some concerned States. Yet, this report illustrates how NSA engagement work can be effective in securing their compliance with the Ottawa Convention's norms.

The report can be downloaded from:

<http://www.genevacall.org/resources/publications.htm>

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IV. New Staff Members at Geneva Call

Armin Köhli, joined Geneva Call in 2007 as Programme Officer for the Middle-East.

Esther Waters, joined Geneva Call in March 2008 as Gender Issues Coordinator.

For hard copies or any question, please contact:
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III. Public Advocacy

1. Panel discussion on NSA engagement at the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations in New York

On 5 November, Geneva Call was invited to present its work at a panel discussion on "Engaging Armed Non-State Actors to Commit to Respecting International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights" organized by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in New York. About 30 representatives of governments and UN agencies attended. The panel discussion included Elisabeth Decrey Warner, Geneva Call President, and Professor Andrew Clapham, Director of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, and member of Geneva Call's Board.

During this trip to the United States, Geneva Call also lobbied for the inclusion of the NSA issue in the resolution on the "assistance in mine action" by the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly. The resolution adopted by that Committee on 19 November includes a reference on NSAs in its preamble.

2. Geneva Call Side-Event during the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent

Geneva Call was invited, as an observer, to the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, entitled "Together for Humanity", and held in Geneva from 27 to 30 November 2007.

In the framework of this international conference, Geneva Call organized on 28 November, in partnership with UNICEF, a side-event, "Engaging Armed Non-State Actors to Respect International Humanitarian Law". The presentations and discussions focused on the challenges of increasing the compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) by NSAs.

While Geneva Call's representatives shared the organization's experience in engaging NSAs in the landmine ban, the UNICEF delegate insisted on the importance of engaging NSAs on child combatants issue and presented UNICEF's experience in negotiating with NSAs on this topic. He related the experience of UNICEF with NSAs in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, and stressed the importance of a good coordination between OCHA, UN peacekeeping missions and actors in the region. Professor Marco Sassòli, President of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights' Board, and President of Geneva Call's board, advocated for the necessity to bind NSAs on IHL. He then emphasized that such NSA engagement does not provide any legitimacy to the NSA or to its causes, or condone its use of force to achieve its objectives. He finally explained how international mechanisms such as IHL could help to resolve conflicts between NSAs and States rather than violence.