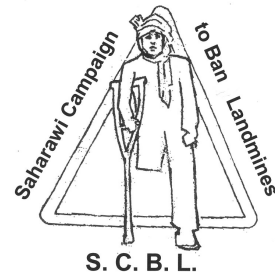




APPEL DE GENÈVE  
GENEVA CALL



## Press release

### The Polisario Front continues the destruction of its landmine stocks

Geneva/Tifariti, 4 March 2011 – On 28 February, the Polisario Front, with technical support from the British organization Landmine Action, destroyed 1,506 deadly anti-personnel (AP) mines in Tifariti, Western Sahara. This is the fourth such destruction since the Polisario Front unilaterally decided to ban AP mines in November 2005 by signing the Geneva Call *Deed of Commitment*. A total of 10,148 stockpiled AP mines have been destroyed to date.

High-level Polisario officials, including Secretary General Mohamed Abdelaziz, as well as representatives of Geneva Call, the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Mine Action Coordination Centre of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), Landmine Action and the Saharawi Association of Mine Victims observed the event.

Pascal Bongard, Geneva Call's Programme Director for Africa, commended the Polisario Front's resolve to comply with the *Deed of Commitment*: "Since signing the *Deed of Commitment* in 2005, mine action activities have expanded in Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara". Landmine Action started mine survey and clearance in 2006 and the International Committee of the Red Cross subsequently set up an orthopaedic centre to assist mine victims in the refugee camps. "But there is much more to be done. 20 years after the ceasefire, landmines continue to kill and maim. Progress is greatly needed on the other side of the berm, Morocco must also join the AP mine ban," added Mr Bongard.

According to the Polisario Minister of Defence, Mohamed Lamine Bouhali, "this destruction reflects the will of the Polisario Front to meet its obligations under the Geneva Call *Deed of Commitment*. It is also a contribution to the efforts of the international community aimed at ridding the world from landmines and cluster munitions." Mr Bouhali concluded by calling on Morocco to accede to international treaties banning these weapons and allowing specialized organizations to work in areas under its control.

More than 20,000 stockpiled AP mines, and thousands of improvised explosive devices and items of abandoned ordnance, have been destroyed by signatories to the Geneva Call's *Deed of Commitment*. Last month, the Puntland authorities in Somalia, also signatories to the *Deed of Commitment*, destroyed more than 380 AP mines with the assistance of Mines Advisory Group (MAG).

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#### NOTES for EDITORS

*The Polisario Front has been engaged in a struggle for the independence of Western Sahara since 1973. After years of fighting, the United Nations brokered a ceasefire in 1991. However, the status of the territory is still a subject of dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front. As a result of the conflict, Western Sahara is heavily contaminated by landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war (ERW). It is divided by a 2,000-kilometre long earthen wall, known as the 'berm', which was built by the Moroccan army during the 1980s and fortified with millions of landmines. Since 1975, there have reportedly been 2,500 casualties, though the total number is not known given the lack of accurate data collection.*