



APPEL DE GENÈVE
GENEVA CALL

COMMUNIQUE

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Niger: the government and the former rebels join forces against landmines

“Bringing together so many members of the Government armed forces and the former rebels around the issue of mine clearance has never been done before, and is a symbol of confidence in the future”, former rebel commander, Agadez, Niger, 23 October 2011.

On 22 and 23 October 2011, Geneva Call organised a technical workshop on humanitarian demining in Agadez in collaboration with the National Commission for the Control and Collection of Illegal Weapons (CNCCAI). The workshop brought together Government authorities, former rebel fronts and international humanitarian organisations working in mine action in Niger to consider the current mine action situation in the country. The event was funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

From 2007 to 2009, the north of the country was the scene of an armed conflict between the Niger Justice Movement (MNJ), including its splinter factions, and Government armed forces. Anti-vehicle mines were used by both parties to the conflict, mostly in the Agadez region, causing more than 300 casualties, including many civilians, and seriously damaging the regional economy.

Workshop participants shared information on mined areas, and discussed how to enhance co-operation in mine clearance. Former rebels agreed to identify the areas that they had mined, and the army agreed to provide maps. The CNCCAI announced it would train and integrate 100 to 200 former rebels into its mine clearance programme. This is similar to what has been done since 2009 in neighbouring Chad, where the national mine action centre has trained 150 former rebels from the Tibesti region in mine clearance.

The workshop also recommended that a joint committee be set up to follow up with field surveys and to collect mines that may be in the hands of private individuals.

Geneva Call was able to organise the workshop thanks to its strong links with both the Government and the MNJ, and the confidence built up since 2008 when it began a programme to raise awareness within the MNJ of international norms with respect to anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. Geneva Call now hopes that the international community will take advantage of the new dynamics that are emerging and the common will being shown by former enemies, and support Niger in its efforts in mine clearance, development and reconciliation.

The workshop is the result of a lengthy process, and is a good example of how important it is to involve all actors in a conflict in seeking resolution to humanitarian problems and building peace.

A few days before the workshop, Geneva Call had organized a technical visit by a landmines expert seconded from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining to advise the CNCCAI on international mine action standards, and to assess needs in terms of technical support, notably in information management. The expertise provided, and recommendations made in the field were greatly appreciated and will certainly further develop mine action in Niger.

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