



## Press release

### Western Sahara: The Polisario Front commits to ban anti-personnel mines

Geneva, 3 November 2005 - The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario Front) today commits to a total ban on the use of anti-personnel (AP) mines in signing Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment. This commitment follows high level meetings, 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), that took place during Geneva Call's mission to Western Sahara this last June. The Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines contributes to this engagement process.

"The Polisario Front believes that landmines are unacceptable weapons in any conflict. It is intolerable that after 14 years of the ceasefire between both parties, landmines continue to kill and maim people, livestock, and divide Saharawi families" said Mohamed Lamine Bouhali, Polisario Minister of Defense, at the signing ceremony in Geneva. "Landmines also constitute a serious obstacle to the future development of our country", added the Minister. "We are willing to cooperate in all fields of humanitarian mine action and to destroy our stockpiles. We urge the international community to assist us in this endeavor."

The Polisario Front has been struggling for the independence of Western Sahara since 1973. A United Nations brokered ceasefire ended the armed conflict in 1991; however, the question of its sovereignty is still a subject of dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front. As a result of the war, Western Sahara is contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnances. Both parties used mines during the conflict and the disputed territory is divided by walls built and fortified with millions of landmines by the Moroccan army. Casualties are regularly reported, on both sides of the walls, particularly among civilians and their livestock.

"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 AP mines is a significant gesture" said Geneva Call President, Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey. "It reflects the will of the Polisario to actively participate in eradicating the landmine scourge and to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We hope that Morocco will reciprocate and soon accede to the Ottawa Convention".

Geneva Call is an international humanitarian organisation dedicated to engaging actors which are not eligible to sign the Ottawa Convention in the fight against anti-personnel mines. It provides a mechanism, complementary to the Ottawa Convention, by which these actors can adhere to the mine ban norm through their signature of the Deed of Commitment. To date, 27 movements have signed the Deed of Commitment.

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