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Geneva Call's mission visits mine affected areas in Somalia

From 15 to 27 September 2004, a team of international NGOs headed by Geneva Call toured Somalia to assess the nature of the landmine problem and the need for assistance in humanitarian mine action. The mission followed up antipersonnel mine ban commitments signed under Geneva Call by 16 Somali factions in November 2002. It visited signatory areas of Puntland, Hiraan and Bakool. In the latter two regions, it was the first time international NGOs came to assess the landmine situation since the fall of the government of Siyad Barre in 1991.

The assessment team, which included specialists from the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) and Danish Demining Group (DDG), met with local authorities, UN agencies, NGOs and mine survivors. Visits were made to mine affected areas, hospitals as well as military camps. The mission faced no security threat and enjoyed a high degree of cooperation from the local authorities. The mission was provided access to mine stockpiles and gained a fair idea of the significant humanitarian and socio-economic impact of landmines and unexploded ordnances (UXOs) on the local population: human and livestock casualties, denial of pastoral and cultivable land, road closure, etc. Most of the mines and UXOs appear to be concentrated along the border with Ethiopia and scattered across the hinterland near towns, military installations, key civilian infrastructure, and on roads.

“There is need for rapid action to reduce the impact of landmines and UXOs, starting with mine risk education and clearance” stated Pascal Bongard, head of mission. “International assistance is imperative as there is little or no mine action currently underway in central and south Somalia.”

Quote from a letter received by Geneva Call sent by a delegate of one the groups: " Special thanks is also due to the mission led by Pascal Bongard of Geneva Call who has dedicated their valuable time, resource and soul to scrutinize the signatory faction's implementation of Deed Commitment and the real effects of land mines on the somali community. "

A full report of the mission, presenting the main findings as well as its key conclusions and recommendations, will be available shortly.

Since 2000, Geneva Call, an independent international humanitarian NGO, has dedicated itself to engaging armed non-state actors (NSAs) in adhering to the antipersonnel mine ban and other humanitarian norms. Geneva Call works in partnership with local NGOs and members of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. The Ottawa Treaty, the major international instrument on landmines, applies only to States. Geneva Call complements the treaty by having NSAs sign a Deed of Commitment to ban antipersonnel mines and

cooperate in mine action. To date, 26 NSAs in the Philippines, Sudan, Iraq, Somalia, Burma and India have signed the Deed under Geneva Call. As exemplified by this mission, the main challenge for Geneva Call is the follow-up of the Deeds of Commitment.

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PHOTO: FSD 2004



In Somalia, as there is no demining activities, the population places the mines and UXOs below piles of wood, in order to protect people from stepping on them.