



Geneva, 16th April 2007

Three ethnic armed groups from Burma/Myanmar commit to a ban on anti-personnel mines.

The Lahu Democratic Front (LDF), the Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF) and the Pa-O People's Liberation Organization (PPO), today committed to a total ban on anti-personnel mines by signing Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment. The signing took place in the historic Alabama Room, in the Town Hall of Geneva.

Both the Burma/Myanmar Government - known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) - and a number of armed ethnic opposition groups continue to use anti-personnel mines, particularly in conflict areas along the country's borders. The consequences of the use of mines on affected populations are dramatic; though exact numbers are not available, it is estimated that up to fifty percent of landmine victims are civilians.

'I know all too well the effect of landmines on the civilian population. My own grandmother lost her life after stepping on a mine laid in a tea plantation. Although opposition groups are using mines to target the military and for defence, all too often the victims are civilians and animals,' stated Mai Aik Phone, General Secretary of the PSLF.

The LDF, PSLF and PPO join three other ethnic armed groups from Burma/Myanmar in agreeing not to use anti-personnel mines and to facilitate mine action. Of the new signatory groups only the LDF were until making this commitment still utilising anti-personnel mines, whilst the PSLF still possess stockpiles of the weapon. Both the LDF and PSLF have declared themselves ready to destroy the stockpiles that they possess, whilst the LDF have pledged to remove the mines that they had laid previously.

'It is essential to engage every armed group, big or small, important user or not and continue building the momentum towards a mine ban in Burma. By signing the Deed of Commitment, the new signatories clearly demonstrate that even when engaged in armed conflict, there are humanitarian norms that can and should be respected.' said Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey, the President of Geneva Call.

Hkun Okker, Chairman of the PPO and also the General Secretary of the National Democratic Front (NDF), emphasised the influence of a recent NDF Position Statement on Landmine Use on the decision to sign the Deed of Commitment by the three organisations when he stated, 'The NDF took a position to encourage individual member organisations to work with Geneva Call on the landmine issue.'

As well as being members of the NDF, the three organisations are all members the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB). It is anticipated that they will be able to utilise their membership in these alliances –which also includes numerous other armed groups- to advocate for a mine ban.

Aike Lone Kham Mwe, Chairman and General Secretary of LDF and NDF Joint Secretary and Deputy of the Military Affairs Committee, said 'Due to my connection with other groups through the NDF Military Affairs Committee, I will try to encourage them to stop using mines.'

HEADQUARTERS
P.O. BOX 334
CH-1211 GENEVA 4
SWITZERLAND
TEL: + 41 22 879 1050
FAX: + 41 22 879 1051

‘Our experience is that once groups sign the Deed of Commitment, they are often amongst the most vocal advocates for a universal mine ban.’ said Ms Reusse-Decrey.

It is hoped that as the number of armed groups rejecting the use of mines increases, the government will also consider banning them.

The LDF, PSLF and PPLO now calls on the government and other armed groups to also ban the use of antipersonnel mines and to cooperate in mine action.

Geneva Call is an international humanitarian organisation dedicated to engaging armed Non-State Actors in relation to mine-ban action. The main international instrument controlling the use of anti-personnel mines - the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (the “Ottawa Convention”) - can only be signed by State Actors. Therefore, Geneva Call’s Deed of Commitment provides a mechanism complementary to the Ottawa Convention that allows armed Non-State Actors to make a commitment to banning anti-personnel mines and taking and facilitating appropriate mine action. This Deed of Commitment takes into account the specificities of armed Non-State Actors and, as such, is a tailor-made and important tool in the continuing efforts to eradicate anti-personnel mine use.

To date, with the new signatories, 34 armed groups have signed the Deed of Commitment.

For further information, please contact Katherine Kramer, Programme Director for Asia
+41 797 844 314 or info@genevacall.org