



Press Release

The National Liberation Army Agrees to Demine Areas of Civilian Use in Nariño, Colombia

Geneva, 30 October 2006 - Geneva Call wishes to congratulate the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) on its decision to demine several hamlets in Samaniego, in the seriously landmine-affected southern Department of Nariño. This action forms part of an agreement (see below) between the ELN and the community of Samaniego, facilitated by Geneva Call and the Municipality of Samaniego, which aims at furthering emergency humanitarian mine action in this locality.

At a press conference in La Havana on 29 October 2006, at the closure of the fourth round of negotiations between the Government and the ELN, Commander Antonio Garcia, Head of the ELN negotiation team, announced the ELN's intentions to proceed to improve the critical situation of the affected population in Samaniego through humanitarian demining. This demining is also intended to open up doors for development activities that benefit the population. Commander Antonio Garcia called for the National Government to facilitate these efforts, as an action which advances the quest for peace in Colombia. He underlined the willingness of the Central Command of the ELN to study other requests for demining, brought forward by communities from other regions. The ELN has declared its willingness to continue to work with Geneva Call in these efforts.

Geneva Call welcomes this gesture on behalf of the ELN, which will first and foremost benefit the civilian population in Samaniego. Secondly, this proposal may build confidence between the parties in the peace process. Nevertheless, this initiative now requires national and international support in order to be implemented. Geneva Call believes that such a proposal naturally requires the priority support and involvement of the Government, but also that of the other national and international actors present in Colombia. Geneva Call hopes that these actors will show firm support for this initiative and invites the Colombian Government to work with Geneva Call in this humanitarian effort.

Geneva Call and its partner organization Colombian Campaign Against Mines have worked for many years in order to make sure that the landmine issue is an integral part of the peace negotiations between the government and the ELN. Given a situation of continued - and even increased - landmine use by armed non-state actors (NSAs) in Colombia, the Colombian government invited Geneva Call to work on the issue in 2003. Since then, Geneva Call has been working on convincing the Colombian NSAs to move towards an anti-personnel mine ban and to implement mine action in favor of affected communities. This is the second time that the ELN undertakes to unilaterally demine areas affected by its landmines, the first one being in Micoahumando, Magdalena Medio, in late 2004.

Although these actions are not enough - given the situation of landmine crisis in many regions in Colombia - the demining proposal by the ELN can be considered as an important measure that will improve the situation of the civilian population. Such initiatives are especially welcome in a country with three new landmine victims a day - an unfortunate world record!

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Emergency Humanitarian Demining in Some Villages in the Municipality of Samaniego – Department of Nariño

In Colombia, the accident rate caused by anti-personnel mines affects the civilian population gravely. The community of Samaniego is proposing an emergency humanitarian demining program in order to relieve the crisis generated by anti-personnel mines within its territory and facilitate implementation of development programs in its rural areas.

In order to develop such initiative, a commission was created, made up of the following people: Monsignor Arturo Correa, Bishop of the Diocese of Ipiales; Harold Montúfar Andrade and James Ibarra on behalf of the Municipality of Samaniego; Mehmet Balci, Program Director, Geneva Call; Clemencia Toro and Claudio Tapio, community representatives; Jairo Rosero and Rita Escobar on behalf of the social organizations of Nariño and Alvaro Jiménez, Guarantor of the *Casa de Paz*.

The National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) listened to the community's proposal and agreed to develop it as well as the terms of the emergency plan through the facilitation of the Municipality of Samaniego and Geneva Call.

The community of Samaniego, by means of the promoter commission, together with the Municipality of Samaniego and Geneva Call present, in the framework of the IV Round of conversations between the National Government and the ELN, **a proposal of Emergency Humanitarian Demining in Samaniego – Department of Nariño.**

1. The components of the proposal

Given the growth of the accident rate caused by mines and how this has affected the community during this year, the emphasis of this proposal is to carry out emergency humanitarian demining in some villages in the Municipality of Samaniego through a plan with the following components:

- a. To educate the population in order to reduce the risk of accidents.
- b. Integral assistance to civilian victims through the municipal, departmental and national institutions own mechanisms.
- c. Impact assessment to delimit and mark dangerous areas, creating emergency passages that are safe for the inhabitants.
- d. Humanitarian demining of areas identified as a priority by the communities.
- e. Sustainability of the process through the design and implementation of a development plan in such areas.

2. Considerations regarding the humanitarian demining proposal

- a) Geneva Call has been carrying out, since 2003, official negotiations with the ELN on demining and has promptly informed the government of Colombia thereof.
- b) The ELN has shown its disposition to carry out mine clearance operations regarding mines laid by this organization in the areas where it is present.
- c) In the occasion of the fourth round of negotiations in La Havana, between the government and the ELN, the community and authorities of Samaniego have built a proposal to clear the mines.
- d) The mine clearance operations contained in the proposal built up by the communities of Samaniego can be developed, and Geneva Call expresses its will to cooperate in order for them to be implemented successfully.
- e) The humanitarian demining proposed by the community of Samaniego facilitates the implementation of development actions presented by the community and its authorities.

- f) In order to reach the best development of such proposal, it is necessary for the Commission, the Municipality and Geneva Call to take together with the authorities all necessary steps to render such development possible.

La Havana, Cuba 19th October 2006

On behalf of the ELN

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