



## Press Release

### **Colombian Guerrilla**

#### **A first humanitarian mine-clearance project, a chance for the civilian population, a chance for hopes of peace!**

After many months of negotiation, Geneva Call has just received a proposal from the National Liberation Army (ELN) of Colombia, which undertakes to conduct a mine clearance project and requests Geneva Call to perform the corresponding quality control.

Geneva Call has been working for two years in Colombia, in partnership with the Colombian Campaign Against Landmines (CCCM), in order to obtain an undertaking against mines from the ELN. This initial result, albeit partial, already constitutes a first victory. Genuine dialogue has been instated, the humanitarian problem raised by mines is being taken into account, and the will to provide solutions is beginning to emerge.

In a letter addressed to Geneva Call, the ELN, which is the second largest Colombian armed movement, announced that it was ready to clear its own antipersonnel mines in certain areas under its influence. This initiative, which will first and foremost benefit the civilian population, now requires national and international support in order to be implemented.

Since the mine-ridden zones are areas of intense conflict, Geneva Call believes that such a proposal naturally requires the priority support and involvement of the Colombian government, but also that of the other national and international actors present in Colombia. Geneva Call expects them to show firm support for this idea and to invite the Colombian government to give it a favourable welcome.

The ELN is set for a unilateral launch of this mine-clearance project in the near future. Subsequently, this zone will need to undergo a quality control conducted by a specialised organisation and then be regularly monitored to ensure it remains clear. It could thus become a model pilot project and lead on to other similar experiences. It is of course the civilian population exposed to tragic accidents that stands to reap the primary benefits from such a project, but the latter might also be conducive to drawing the actors in the conflict closer together in a common cause and to enabling progressive resumption of peace talks.

**This proposal by the guerrilla is  
a chance to witness the first humanitarian mine clearance project in Colombia,  
a chance for thousands of people to live in a safe environment once more,  
a chance for children to be able to play again without danger and  
a chance for hopes of peace.**

**A chance to which all efforts must be devoted and  
that must not be passed by.**

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Alvaro Jimenez, Coordinator CCCM

### A few explanations:

For the past two years Geneva Call, in conjunction with the CCCM, has been working with the Colombian guerrilla and the government of this country has always lent its full support to the activities of the Swiss organisation. In June 2004, at an international forum (on antipersonnel mines, non-state actors and humanitarian agreements) organised in Bogota by Geneva Call and the CCCM, the Vice-President of the Republic personally took the floor and publicly saluted and expressed his support for the activities of Geneva Call. On this occasion, he had authorised the spokesman of the ELN, Francisco Galan, to make a public speech. The principle of a humanitarian agreement had then been put forward by the ELN and was favourably received by the Colombian government. Today, the ELN is taking a further step through its concrete proposal to clear a seriously affected zone of mines.

Geneva Call has always welcomed the significant efforts undertaken by the Colombian government to comply with its signature of the Ottawa Convention. Last October, the government destroyed its last remaining stocks of mines and Geneva Call applauded this initiative. But if Colombia wishes in due course to become a country entirely freed of this inhuman weapon, it is indispensable that the guerrilla should also be involved in this struggle against antipersonnel mines. The proposal presented to Geneva Call by the ELN is a first step in this direction and deserves support.

Geneva Call is an international organisation based in Switzerland which is striving to engage armed non-state actors to comply with humanitarian norms, and in particular to renounce the use of antipersonnel mines and to cooperate in actions against antipersonnel mines. Geneva Call considers antipersonnel mines as a discriminatory weapon and their use as a violation of international law.

The Geneva Call programme in Colombia is supported by the European Union and the Swiss government.