

Campaign deplores continued mine use in Colombia

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(Wednesday 28 January 2004 Bogotá, Colombia) Calls for universal adherence to Ban Treaty

At the opening of a roundtable discussion on landmines in the Americas region, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) called for an end to antipersonnel mine use in Colombia by guerrillas and paramilitaries and urged greater adherence to the norm established by the 1997 treaty prohibiting the use, production, trade and stockpiling of the weapon.

"We deplore the continued use of antipersonnel mines in Colombia. It is simply unacceptable," said Ms. Mary Wareham, Global Research Coordinator for the ICBL's Landmine Monitor initiative. The ICBL believes it is essential that the issue of antipersonnel landmines is included in any peace negotiations.

Colombia is the only country in the region where antipersonnel mines continue to be planted on a regular basis. According to Landmine Monitor, mines are used by the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) guerrilla groups, as well as AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia) paramilitaries.

In 2002, 530 landmine casualties were reported in Colombia, more than double the number reported for 2001. "We are deeply disturbed by the growing number of innocent mine victims and urge appropriate and comprehensive assistance for them over the long-term," said Ms. Wareham.

The ICBL called on FARC, ELN and AUC forces to make unilateral declarations renouncing antipersonnel mines and pledging support for humanitarian measures to remedy the landmine problem, such as demining and victim assistance. "Everyone should adhere to the prohibitions contained in the Mine Ban Treaty, including groups that are not eligible to sign," said Mr. Charlie Avendaño, the ICBL's Landmine Monitor Research Coordinator for the Americas.

A total of 150 governments have joined the Mine Ban Treaty, and numerous non-state actors in countries such as the Philippines, Iraq, Sudan and Somalia have renounced use. "Three-quarters of the world's nations now accept that the long-term humanitarian impact of the antipersonnel mine far outweighs its short-term military utility and have chosen to ban the weapon," said Mr. Avendaño.

Every one of the 35 countries in the Americas region is a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty, except Cuba, the United States, and Haiti. Haiti has signed but not yet ratified. "Neither Cuba nor the United States has valid reasons to reject the Mine Ban Treaty. We encourage them to join without delay," said Mr. Álvaro Jiménez Millán of the Colombian Campaign Against Landmines/ Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas.

The First Review Conference of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty will take place in Nairobi, Kenya at the end of November 2004. "States Parties need to follow-through on the obligations contained in the treaty ahead of the first Review Conference," said Mr. Gustavo Oliveira Vieira of the Brazilian Campaign to Ban Landmines/Campanha Brasileira Contra Minas Terrestres. "We are disappointed that so few have enacted domestic legislation to implement the treaty. This is essential if the ban provisions are to have any teeth." Only eight States Parties in the region have domestic legislation in place: Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Trinidad and Tobago.

"We urge those States with stockpiled mines left to destroy to accelerate their efforts, and we call on Brazil to reduce the huge number of mines it is retaining for training in demining," Mr. Oliveira Vieira said. "We also call on all governments to redouble their commitment to addressing the humanitarian problems created by landmines by supporting mine action and victim assistance programs over the long-term."

Four States Parties (Colombia, Guyana, Suriname, and Uruguay) still need to destroy their stockpiled antipersonnel mines to comply with the Mine Ban Treaty. Three governments completed their stockpile destruction in the second half of 2003 (Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela). In June 2003, Colombia commenced destruction of 23,451 antipersonnel mines and is due to complete the task by February 2005. Brazil is retaining 16,545 mines, the second highest of any State Party in the world.

ICBL members from around the region are in Bogotá this week for their annual meeting, one of a series of regional meetings being held in the coming months to ensure that States Parties take the necessary steps to fulfill their treaty obligations both in the lead-up to Nairobi and beyond.

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