

Vilnius leads the way

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(Tuesday 01 June 2004) Lithuania destroys its last antipersonnel landmines and advocates for the regional approach on landmines by hosting a two day conference

On 8-9 June 2004, Lithuania, in cooperation with Canada, Germany and the Netherlands, will host the first ever regional conference on landmines in Vilnius for North and Eastern Europe countries. In addition to Lithuania, Belarus, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and more recently Estonia have joined the Mine Ban Convention. Poland and Ukraine are signatories and have yet to ratify. Other participants to the conference will include Finland, Latvia and Russia, as well as Austria, Netherlands, Italy and the United Kingdom.

On 7 June, Lithuania will organise a ceremony during which it will destroy the last batch of its 3,925 antipersonnel mines stockpile. By destroying all its stock and by doing so far ahead of the deadline imposed by the Convention (1 November 2007) Lithuania is demonstrating its commitment to rid the earth of this weapon and fully comply with its obligations.

In a region which counts the biggest stockpiles of antipersonnel mines, it is encouraging that Lithuania chose to destroy its stock before the first Review Conference of the Convention, the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World, scheduled on 29 November-3 December in Kenya. The conference will undoubtedly provide a good opportunity for participants to discuss how stockpile destruction, and other actions to reduce the mine threat toward civilian populations, can be further carried out in the region.

International organisations involved in the fight against landmines such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations, NATO and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), will also be represented. The ICBL delegation will include representatives from Belarus, Finland, Latvia, Russia and Ukraine as well as the Government Relations officer.