

Geneva Diary: Report from the GICHD

by Ian Mansfield [Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining]

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining has been busy over the last several months. The GICHD recently organized an African Francophone Conference on demining in Benin and provided technical input for the recent Convention on Cluster Munitions. In addition, GICHD published technical guides related to road clearance, safe ammunition storage and cluster munitions.

Francophone Meeting in the Republic of Benin

The first African Francophone seminar on mine action and explosive remnants of war took place 20–22 October 2008 in Cotonou, Benin. The meeting, hosted by the government of Benin, was organized by the GICHD in collaboration with the *Centre de Perfectionnement aux Actions Post-conflituelles de Deminage et Depollution* and was financially supported by the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* and the government of Switzerland.

This first meeting was specifically planned as a forum for the exchange of experiences. Participants benefited from the opportunity to share information and access expertise on many components of mine action in a French-language setting. The meeting was attended by officials from 14 African French-speaking countries actively involved in reducing the impact of mines and ERW¹ in their territories, and representatives from international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and Economic Community of West African States.

Another key component of GICHD's Francophone program is the provision of mine-action resources in French. This includes an online library of mine-action documents, the GICHD French Web site, the establishment of an experts network and translation of relevant documents.

Information Management and IMSMA

The GICHD recently made a number of significant changes to the IMSMA project. These changes have included reviewing the software development and system migration priorities, creating an implementing partner program, developing a new distribution policy, and placing a greater emphasis on improved communications with the users of IMSMA and other relevant organizations. For

the implementing partner program, a training course was held in April 2009 for representatives of four organizations who will now assist with the IMSMA installation and maintenance work of the GICHD. To enhance communication and user feedback, GICHD established an IMSMA users' network as an open Google group, which can be joined via the GICHD Web site at www.gichd.org.

12th International Meeting

The GICHD hosted the 12th International Meeting of Mine Action Program Directors and U.N. Advisors in Geneva from 23–27 March 2009. Over 200 representatives from 40 mine-action programs, U.N. agencies, nongovernmental organizations and commercial companies attended. The United Nations Mine Action Team chaired the meeting, and topics discussed included transition of programs to national ownership, linking mine action to development, victim surveillance and a number of technical issues. A full report of the meeting is available at E-Mine Web site: www.mineaction.org.

Recent Publications

Due to the growing concern caused by accidental explosions at ammunition storage facilities, the GICHD updated a previous study and released *A Guide to Ammunition Storage* in November 2008. Over the past eight years, available records show that explosions have killed or injured thousands of people. In 2008 alone, explosions in Albania, Bulgaria, Iran, Iraq, Ukraine and Uzbekistan reportedly caused hundreds of casualties and scattered munitions over many square kilometers of previously safe land. The publication identifies and promotes good practice in the safe storage of ammunition and contributes to international efforts to address this important issue.

A revised and updated version of the *Guide to Cluster Munitions* was recently launched at the Conference on the Destruction of Cluster Munitions, presented by the German and Norwegian governments with support from the GICHD in Berlin in late June 2009. Additionally, the GICHD released *A Mechanical Demining Handbook* in early July, providing practical advice on the management and tasking of machines to support various demining activities. The concept of "releasing suspect land," rather than just focusing on "clearance," has been an important issue for the GICHD



for the past couple of years, and we are pleased to see it as the theme for the next issue of *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*. The booklet *Guide to Non-technical Land Release* was published in 2007 and drew on case studies from six countries. More recently, three new International Mine Action Standards have been developed on land release. They are: (1) 8.20 Land release, (2) 8.21 Non-technical survey and (3) 8.22 Technical survey.⁴

The GICHD is also continuing research into various new technical survey methods, and this information will be published later in 2009. In conjunction with this, the GICHD has provided practical advice and assistance to mine-affected countries in the development of land-release policies and processes. These have included, among others, Angola, Cambodia, Chad, Laos and Mozambique. ♦

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Ian Mansfield is the Deputy Director and Head of Operations at the GICHD and is responsible for all of the center's operational, technical and research activities. He is also responsible for analyzing existing and potential areas of activity for the GICHD, as well as all evaluation, assessment and consultancy activities. Mansfield holds a Master of Business Administration and a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

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