

Engaging Armed NSAs in a Landmine Ban: A Review of Geneva Call's Action, 2000–2007

Geneva Call has been engaging armed non-state actors in a landmine ban since 2000. The Swiss-based nongovernmental organization was created in response to the realization that the landmine problem could only be comprehensively addressed if NSAs, who are the primary users of such weapons today, were included in the solution. To this end, Geneva Call has developed an innovative mechanism—the *Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action*¹—that enables NSAs, who cannot accede to the Ottawa Convention,² to undertake to respect its norms.

by Pascal Bongard [Geneva Call]

In November 2007, seven years after its launch, Geneva Call released a comprehensive review of the work it has carried out with its partners to advocate the mine ban among non-state actors. The review, *Engaging Armed Non-State Actors in a Landmine Ban: The Geneva Call Progress Report (2000–2007)*,³ which is largely based on the findings of an internal assessment⁴ and research efforts conducted by Geneva Call,⁵ documents the progress accomplished to date and the challenges that lie ahead. In an effort to further enhance the effectiveness of engaging NSAs in the future, it also provides practical recommendations.

Progress to Date

The report notes that, by its publication, 34 NSAs from Burma/Myanmar, Burundi, India, Iraq, the Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey and Western Sahara had signed the Deed of Commitment.⁶ This achievement is noteworthy because many of these groups were previously involved in the use and production of anti-personnel mines; additionally, as a result of Geneva Call and its partners' efforts, eight other NSAs have pledged to prohibit or limit the use of AP mines, either unilaterally or through a ceasefire agreement with the government.

Since 2000, signatory NSAs have, for the most part, complied with their obligations under the Deed of Commitment by refraining from using AP mines, cooperating in mine action with specialized organizations and, for some of them, destroying their stockpiles. Nearly all signatories have cooperated with Geneva Call's monitoring of their



Destruction of more than 3,300 stockpiled anti-personnel mines by the Polisario Front, in compliance with the Deed of Commitment, Western Sahara, 2007.
PHOTO COURTESY OF GENEVA CALL

compliance by providing information on the measures they have taken to implement the Deed of Commitment and facilitating field verification missions.

In some countries, the signing of the Deed of Commitment precipitated the launch of much-needed mine-action programs by specialized organizations in areas under the control of signatory NSAs. Such progress has occurred, for example, in southern Sudan and Western Sahara, where international involvement in humanitarian mine action was limited, if not nonexistent, before the signing.

Signatory NSAs have been instrumental in the accession to and implementation of the Ottawa Convention by their respective states. In Sudan, the signing of the Deed of Commitment by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in 2001 was a key consideration in the government's decision to ratify the Ottawa Convention two years later.⁷ In Iraq, officials of the Kurdish NSAs who became members of the national government after the fall of Saddam Hussein regime in 2003 encouraged the government to join the Convention. Iraq acceded to the Ottawa Convention in 2007, as one of the very few states in the region to have done so.

Geneva Call's initiative has received increased support from the international community. States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, the United Nations, intergovernmental bodies such as the European Union and the African Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines have repeatedly

acknowledged that progress towards a mine-free world would be enhanced if NSAs observed the Ottawa Convention's provisions and have supported efforts to engage NSAs.

Challenges

Although much progress has been made, engaging NSAs in a mine ban has not been without its challenges. Many NSAs still have not agreed to the Deed of Commitment and continue to resort to AP mines and/or victim-activated improvised explosive devices. Among them are major users and producers such as Colombian guerrillas and Burmese opposition groups, which are reluctant to renounce these weapons; moreover, several NSAs retain large stocks of AP mines in territories under their control.

Progress in the implementation of the Deed of Commitment has been slowed by the lack of technical assistance and resources available to signatory NSAs and Geneva Call. A number of signatories have been unable, for example, to undertake mine action on their own—particularly mine clearance, stockpile destruction and victim assistance—due to their limited technical knowledge and lack of qualified manpower, equipment and funding. A lack of funding has also affected the capacity of Geneva Call and its technical partners to support mine action in areas under the control of signatory groups.

A related challenge has been to ensure that all signatories fully comply with the Deed of Commitment. Some groups have experienced difficulties in getting their rank and file to adhere to all obligations. A few others have not yet provided details on their AP mine stocks nor proceeded with the destruction of such mines.

In some countries, Geneva Call has encountered problems in accessing NSAs operating in remote areas. In other cases,

safety concerns and fighting have hampered the implementation and monitoring of the Deed of Commitment. In Somalia for instance, a volatile security situation and renewed clashes in 2006 prevented Geneva Call and its technical partners from inspecting mine stocks held by signatory factions and arranging for their destruction.

Although most states concerned with NSAs have cooperated with Geneva Call, a small number of them have made the work challenging. Turkey has consistently opposed engagement with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a group it considers a "terrorist" organization, arguing that this would confer it legitimacy. Though not objecting to the principle of NSA engagement, a few other states have restricted Geneva Call's access to areas where NSAs operate or have obstructed mine-action efforts by specialized organizations.

Results

Since the launch of Geneva Call in 2000, significant progress has been made in engaging NSAs in the landmine ban. Thirty-five armed groups have now signed the Deed of Commitment and, for the most part, have abided by its terms; moreover, in some countries, their commitment has facilitated the launch of new mine-action programs by specialized organizations as well as the accession to the Ottawa Convention by their respective states. Many challenges remain, but Geneva Call's *Progress Report* illustrates how NSA engagement work can be effective in securing their compliance with the Ottawa Convention's provisions. ♦

See Endnotes, page 113

The report can be downloaded from Geneva Call's Web site: www.genevacall.org. Hard copies can be obtained by writing to info@genevacall.org.



Pascal Bongard has been working with Geneva Call since 2000. He is currently Program Director for Africa and Policy Advisor. Before joining Geneva Call, Bongard collaborated with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He holds master's degrees in political science from the London School of Economics and in international relations from the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva.

Pascal Bongard
Program Director and Policy Advisor
Geneva Call
P.O. Box 334
1211 Geneva 4 / Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 879 1055
Fax: +41 22 879 1051
E-mail: pbongard@genevacall.org
Web site: www.genevacall.org

News Brief

Mongoose, Robots Team up for Demining

A team of Sri Lankan researchers has been testing a new system for clearing minefields. This system involves the use of trained mongooses, which possess a heightened sense of smell, to detect buried explosives.

The mongooses are tethered to remote-controlled robots, which carry small video cameras that detect the precise location of a buried explosive. Researchers say the system is particularly beneficial because the combined weight of each pair is insufficient to trigger a landmine.

In one test, according to reports, the robot-mongoose team took just 30 seconds to locate a buried landmine a few feet away from where it started.