

Press Release -- For Immediate Release



Mine-Free Americas is 'mission possible' if countries step up efforts

Bogotá, 25 November 2009 — Over ten years ago, governments in the Americas challenged themselves to become the world's first mine-free region. This vision could soon become reality if States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty re-double their efforts to clear mines from the ground and provide assistance to survivors, and if Cuba and the United States embrace a ban on mines, declared civil society organizations today at the regional launch of *Landmine Monitor Report 2009*. The event took place on the eve of the Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World, opening Sunday and convening over a thousand campaigners and government representatives from around the world, including dozens of high-level dignitaries.

Cuba and the United States are the only countries in the region that have not joined the treaty. Cuba has mines planted around the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay. "US acceptance of the Mine Ban Treaty is long overdue," said Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch, a member of the US Campaign to Ban Landmines, "President Barack Obama should accede to the treaty without delay. Antipersonnel mines are an outdated weapon whose time has passed."

Creation of a mine-free hemisphere has been jeopardized by setbacks in Colombia over the past decade. Non-state armed groups have used antipersonnel mines regularly and with increasing frequency over the course of the past decade, leaving more land contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) continue to be among the largest users of antipersonnel landmines in the world, along with other non-state armed groups in Colombia including the National Liberation Army (ELN).

"We urge all armed groups to stop using antipersonnel mines and other victim-activated explosive devices, and to cooperate with efforts to locate and clear mined areas," said Alvaro Jiménez Millán, National Coordinator of the Colombian Campaign Against Landmines. "Saving civilian lives should take priority over anything else."

From 1999–2008, 6,696 mine/ERW casualties were recorded in Colombia. The number of casualties has increased steadily over the past decade and in 2008 Colombia recorded the second highest number of casualties in the world, after Afghanistan. Many civilians have been displaced due to the suspected presence of mines, or carry out their daily activities fearing they could step on a mine.

"Two of the major challenges facing Colombia are the obligation to carry out demining to humanitarian standards, and the crucial need to ensure that civilian landmine survivors, wherever they are, enjoy full and non-discriminatory access to the services provided for by the law," said Sylvie Brigot, Executive Director of the Nobel Peace Co-Laureate International Campaign to Ban Landmines. "Many mine survivors have difficulty navigating the complex procedures and bureaucracy to access services, and assistance in rural areas is lacking."

Despite ongoing mine use and increased casualties, the full extent of mine contamination in civilian areas in Colombia is unknown, and this lack of information continues to impede mine clearance efforts. Progress has been made in clearing military bases of mines, but clearance in civilian areas, where the majority of casualties take place, has been slow. As a State Party to the Mine Ban Treaty, Colombia must clear all known mined areas by 1 March 2011.

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Under the Mine Ban Treaty, States Parties must clear all mined areas under their jurisdiction or control within 10 years. Eleven countries worldwide have met their clearance obligation, and 45% are in the Americas—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Suriname.

Despite this progress, eight countries in the region remain affected by mines—Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, and Venezuela. Nicaragua plans to complete mine clearance in 2010 and Chile will likely meet its 2012 clearance deadline. Ecuador and Peru have made slow progress despite the relatively small amount of land remaining to be cleared, and Venezuela has yet to clear a single mine from six contaminated military bases.

As in Colombia, one of the greatest challenges throughout the region remains ensuring survivors receive ongoing care and assistance. Survivors are generally poor and live in rural areas, while services are usually only available in urban areas. Many survivors cannot afford the services they need to access, and face challenges navigating complicated administrative procedures to receive government compensation and support. Survivors require support for the rest of their lives, so even after the last mined area is cleared in a country, governments still have an obligation to provide assistance to survivors.

ENDS

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Background

Landmine Monitor is the research and monitoring program of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. It reports on the international community's response to the global landmine, cluster munition and explosive remnants of war problem. www.lm.icbl.org/lm/2009

The **International Campaign to Ban Landmines**, 1997 Nobel Peace Prize Co-Laureate, is a global network in over 70 countries, working for a world free of landmines and cluster munitions. www.icbl.org

The **Mine Ban Treaty** comprehensively bans use, production, and trade of antipersonnel mines, requires destruction of stockpiled mines within four years, requires destruction of mines already in the ground within ten years, and urges extensive programs to assist the victims of landmines.

The **Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World** is a milestone event where states and the mine ban community will review the status of the Mine Ban Treaty and set out steps that need to be taken to create a mine-free world. It will be held from 29 November–4 December 2009. www.icbl.org/cartagenasummit