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GENEVA CALL NEWSLETTER

This Newsletter highlights activities conducted between January and May.

In India and Iran, three new signatories to the *Deed of Commitment* banning anti-personnel (AP) mines: the Zomi Re-unification Organisation, The Komala Party of Kurdistan and Komala - The Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran

Geneva Call did not gather any new signatures to its *Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action (Deed of Commitment)* in 2008, but is pleased to announce that three NSAs have adhered since the beginning of 2009. In some cases, negotiations can be long, but the results – both in terms of the number of NSAs adhering, and in terms of the respect of the commitments made – are very encouraging.

- The Zomi Re-unification Organisation, an armed non-State actor (NSA) operating in northeast India, became the 36th signatory to the *Deed of Commitment*, at the end of February. Formed in 1993, the ZRO seeks to reunify the Zo people of the region (known variously as Zomi, Mizo, Kuki and Chin) who are dispersed throughout parts of northeast India, Burma/Myanmar and Bangladesh, and to strive for the establishment of a Zo homeland. The ZRO began to destroy its stockpiles and clear the mines that it had laid after commencing dialogue with Geneva Call in 2008. It reported that it was able to complete these tasks prior to its signing of the *Deed of Commitment*.

- On 7 April, Komalah - The Kurdistan Organization of the Communist Party of Iran, and the Komala Party of Kurdistan also signed the *Deed of Commitment* in Geneva. "With their commitment, the two Iranian Kurdish organizations prove their respect for some humanitarian principles", commented Elisabeth Decrey Warner, Geneva Call President. Both organizations had sporadically used AP mines in the past. The Kurdish provinces in Iran, like all provinces bordering Iraq, have been particularly affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance.

Neither country is a State Party to the AP Mine Ban Convention.

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The importance of victim assistance and Mine Risk Education (MRE) is highlighted through the three organizations' commitment to a total AP mine ban and pledge to cooperate in mine action, thus helping to reduce casualties and improve the lives of mine survivors.



Photo: Picture of signing ceremony in Geneva.
Credit: Geneva Call.

Somaliland Outlaws AP Mines

In early 2009, Somaliland's parliament passed a landmark law that bans the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of AP mines and similar victim-activated improvised explosive devices. The legislation was approved by the House of Representatives on 17 January and by the House of Elders (Guurti) on 3 March. Geneva Call, the Institute for Practical Research and Training (IPRT) and the Somaliland Mine Action Centre (SMAC) had previously conducted a two-day workshop with members of the two chambers to assist in drafting the text of the legislation and to prepare for its implementation.

Somaliland has on many occasions expressed interest in adhering to the 1997 AP Mine Ban Convention but cannot do so as it is not internationally recognized as a State. In 1999, the House of Representatives passed a resolution calling for the elimination of AP mines. However, no binding measures had been taken to prohibit the use, possession and transfer of this weapon until the adoption of the legislation. The law mirrors the AP Mine Ban Convention in all respects, with similar obligations for stockpile destruction, mine clearance and victim assistance. It also establishes sanctions for non-compliance and contains provisions for monitoring implementation.

Senegal and Burma/Myanmar: Landmine Ban Awareness Workshops

Geneva Call continued efforts to promote the adherence to the mine ban and humanitarian mine action of NSAs active in these two countries.

- On 2 April, Geneva Call and its local partner, the Association pour la Promotion Rurale de l'Arrondissement de Nyassia – Solidarité, Développement, Paix (APRAN-SDP) held a mine ban advocacy workshop with the 'Contact Group' of the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC). The Contact Group committed to discussing the issue of humanitarian mine action in detail with the movement's military wings. The following day, Geneva Call facilitated a first exchange between the Contact Group and the Centre National d'Action Anti-Mines au Sénégal (CNAMS), on perspectives on mine action in the region. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)'s focal point for Senegal also participated in the mission.

- The first of a series of consultation meetings with the political and military leadership of Burmese NSAs was held as part of the joint project between the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB) and Geneva Call on 16-17 February. The 19 participants, drawn from the Wa National Organisation/Army, the Pa'O People's Liberation Organisation and the Lahu Democratic Union, discussed various aspects of the landmine issue, including the impact on civilians and regulations on landmine use under International Humanitarian Law. The participants clearly understood the negative impact of landmines on civilians, and while some NSAs were not ready to ban AP mines totally, they did explore the in-

terim actions that they could undertake, alongside civil society, to reduce the impact of landmines on civilians, such as informing villagers about the dangers of mines, assisting landmine victims, limiting mine use as much as possible, and ensuring that mines were cleared after their use ended.



Photo: Senegal - Advocacy Workshop with MFDC.
Credit: Geneva Call.

Exploratory Mission in Colombia on Protection of Women in the Midst of Conflict

In the framework of its strategy to expand its work to other humanitarian and human rights norms, Geneva Call is undertaking exploratory work and research on women and NSAs in armed conflict settings. During a visit to Colombia in February-March, Geneva Call conducted bilateral meetings with 20 organizations involved in addressing the issue of protection of women during conflict, and participated in a focus group in Popayan with women's and indigenous organizations, members of Ruta Pacifica, a national network of women's rights associations. Some women attending the focus group shared their personal stories. Staff collected information pertaining to the key issues related to the protection of women in the conflict areas in Colombia, with specific focus on the current role of women within the NSAs, the current practices of the NSAs with regards to women's protection and the extent and nature of violence against women by armed groups. Furthermore, Geneva Call was able to gain an overview of different initiatives and projects which address women's protection during conflict, as well as initiatives to engage armed groups on this issue. They helped to identify potential gaps and explore ways to develop Geneva Call's work on this issue, as well as identify potential partners. This visit constituted the first part of the assessment. Geneva Call will continue enhancing its understanding in the thematic area by collecting more information and perspectives, notably from local and regional actors and assessing the added value that Geneva Call might bring.

Setting Goals for Mine Action in Karenni State (Burma/Myanmar)

Following a meeting held in May 2008, Geneva Call supported the organization of a second mine action meeting by the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Centre (KSWDC), in February. 27 representatives from environmental, development, research, youth and women's community based organizations (CBOs) as well as from the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and Karenni Army (KA) attended.

The Survey Action Centre was invited to make a special presentation on lessons learned from conducting Landmine Impact Surveys around the world. This complemented KSWDC's presentation on the status of its mine risk education and data collection activities and the challenges it faces. A recurrent theme was that landmine victim surveys needed to be followed up with some form of victim assistance, such as the provision of prosthetic devices. One of the main conclusions of the discussion was that there was not enough information available about the landmine situation inside Karenni state. Many CBOs saw a role for themselves in aiding in MRE dissemination.



Photo: Second Mine Action Meeting.
Credit: Geneva Call.

Iran: Resolution on AP Landmines

The Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran (CNFI), which is made up of 16 Iranian opposition political parties and NSAs, unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the AP mine ban during its General Assembly Meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on 3 April. In addition to affirming commitment to the ban on AP mines, the resolution called for NSAs from Iran to sign the *Deed of Commitment* of Geneva Call and for Iran to accede to the Mine Ban Convention. They also called on people everywhere to join in the common task of eradicating these weapons and meet the enormous challenges of mine action, including victim assistance, in Iran.

Several CNFI members are affected by AP mines, especially in Ahwaz, Kurdistan and Western Balochistan. One CNFI member, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, has already signed Geneva Call's *Deed of Commitment* banning AP mines. ([Statement here](#)).

It is hoped that this resolution will lead to mine ban commitments by other member NSAs, as well as lead to greater collaboration in mine action for the benefit of populations living under the threat of these weapons. (www.genevacall.org).

Supporting mine action by NSAs which have not banned AP mines: challenges and dilemmas

As part of its engagement process, Geneva Call supports implementation of the *Deed of Commitment* banning AP mines. For example, it supports mine ban dissemination sessions among NSA fighters or links the humanitarian mine action needs with specialised agencies that can provide technical support.

In parallel, Geneva Call maintains open dialogue with NSAs, which are not yet ready to commit to the AP mine ban; one track of this dialogue, very often, is to encourage NSAs to begin mine action, which although short of an outright ban, could be a step in the right direction while simultaneously responding to the urgent humanitarian needs of affected communities. Examples of such progress, could be the decision to mark and map where the NSA has placed mines for easier removal in the future, or to commence the removal of AP mines in certain areas. Geneva Call has received requests from some NSAs for technical and material assistance in this regard. Unfortunately, there could be questions raised on whether this support would be used solely for humanitarian purposes.

Geneva Call's purpose in engaging these NSAs is to maintain and develop the awareness of the dangers of using AP mines and to enhance the protection of civilians despite the lack of an outright ban. And yet, what are the limits of such a dialogue? Could a refusal to provide requested support have negative consequences on the dialogue process, and weaken incentives to join the mine ban? Or can NSAs be further encouraged to limit the use of AP mines if provided with simple equipment and training, for example, on how to mark and map mined areas? Could this "support" be construed as "supporting the use of AP mines" or could it be understood as a means to prepare for mine action, by making clearance easier in the future?

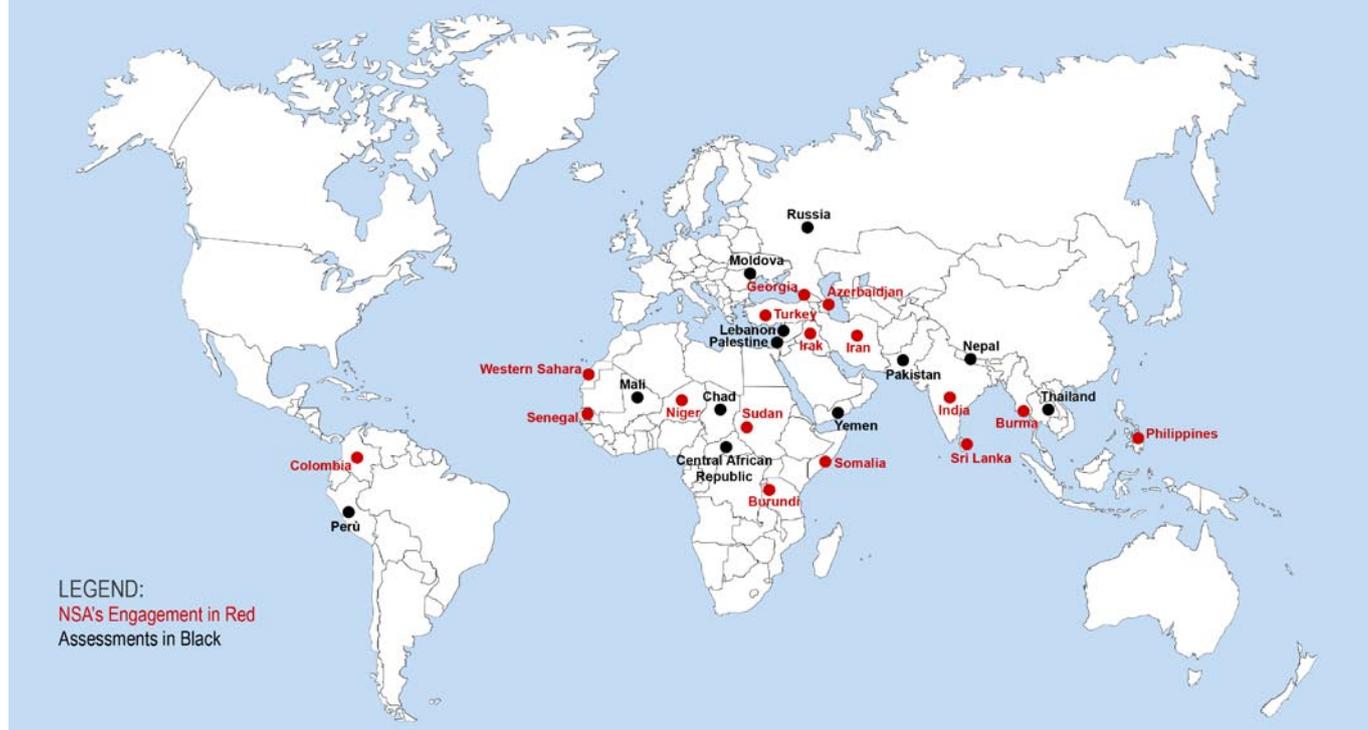
Geneva Call will be pleased to receive your thoughts on this issue. (info@genevacall.org).

Raising Awareness on Landmine Contamination in the Kurdish Regions

In April, at the invitation of the Kurdish Institute in Paris, Geneva Call held a public seminar on the landmine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) problem and mine action in the Kurdish regions of four States: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The seminar was well attended by Kurdish persons originating from of all four States, as well as by Kurdish news- and TV-journalists. The vivid discussion that followed Geneva Call's presentation turned mainly on the challenges of mine action in the areas of conflict and the role that Kurdish civil society and media could play to accelerate demining and improve victim assistance.

At the invitation of the Canadian Red Cross and the University of British Columbia, Geneva Call participated in the conference 'On the Edges of Conflict' in Vancouver, Canada, 29-31 March. Elisabeth Decrey Warner sat on the panel entitled "Rise of Non-State Armed Groups", where she presented a working paper sharing Geneva Call's experience on the role of reciprocity in non-international armed conflict. While practice is not yet sufficient for broad conclusions, Geneva Call's observations on the AP mine ban show that reciprocity has not played a significant role in ensuring compliance once formal commitments have been made by either the State or NSA. However, reciprocity has been a factor in influencing whether a party will in fact make formal commitments towards the AP mine ban. The final version of the working paper will be included in a collected volume to be published by University of British Columbia Press. (This paper will be made available on Geneva Call's website).

Geneva Call's Engagement with NSAs in the World (2008-09)



GENEVA CALL

P.O. BOX 334 CH-1211 GENEVA 4
TEL: +41 22 879 1050 FAX: +41 22 879 1051
WWW.GENEVACALL.ORG INFO@GENEVACALL.ORG