

DID NOT SPEAK



UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Statement on behalf of
The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
at the
Nairobi Summit for a Mine-Free World**

29th November – 3rd December 2004

Mr. President
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to speak at this important Conference on a Mine Free World (the first review conference of the Ottawa Convention). UNHCR places great importance on positive outcomes from this conference with regard to the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons. It is encouraging to see that the stockpiling, production and destruction of anti-personnel mines is still considered to be a political priority.

The use of these weapons has, and is still, causing too many casualties amongst the most vulnerable people in many countries. UNHCR is very aware of the destructive nature of these weapons on the social fabric in conflict and post conflict countries in Africa, Asia and Southern Europe. It is often the poorest people who suffer through delayed economic recovery and development of countries emerging from civil unrest and social upheaval. These weapons cannot be considered to be legitimate weapons of war when most of the casualties are civilians, including a high proportion of women and children.

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) are becoming more and more a major issue as their use in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq are increasing the dangers to civilians from unexploded ordnance (UXO's). Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) covers this very issue and is timely as it compliments the successes gained through the Ottawa Treaty process. More emphasis has to be placed on encouraging States to accede to the Convention.

Mr. President,

UNHCR is attending the Summit in Nairobi as a member of the UN family of agencies working together to improve the capability of mine clearance in humanitarian operations. UNHCR is a part of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) chaired steering group looking at the issue of UN Policy concerning mine action. This is of particular interest to us regarding rapid response during an emergency and gender integration within de-mining programmes. It is important from a refugee agency perspective to include women in de-mining programmes including Mine Risk Education and operational planning.

As part of this UN family of mine action agencies, UNHCR is very aware of the necessity to maintain the momentum of the Ottawa Convention process. It is important to accelerate the clearance of all mined areas close to settlements and urban areas where they present a danger to the civilian population. UNHCR strongly

advocates the acceleration of clearing areas on a priority basis, particularly those areas that have a significant impact on returning populations such as agricultural land, river banks, water points/wells, villages and roads.

UNHCR is also advocating more emphasis on the development of national plans involving local authorities; sub-national government structures and mine affected communities. We also encourage the establishment of National Mine Action Centres in cooperation with UN Agencies, International and Non Government organizations (NGO). This would also include better cooperation to improve national and international policies and development strategies and the increased use of local demining capabilities rather than expensive expatriate arrangements. The national plans should emphasize the clearance of high and medium priority areas as a matter of particular urgency.

Mr. President
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNHCR continues to advocate for more donor support for clearing mined areas as required by Article 6 of the Convention and better coordination to improve the effectiveness of donated money in support of mine clearance operations.

UNHCR also emphasizes the importance of ensuring the sustainability of commitments to de-mining programmes by integrating mine action into broader humanitarian and/or development assistance programmes. Donors should consider providing multi-year funding to mine action programmes, paying particular attention to the specific needs and circumstances of the least developed State Parties, as well as refugee repatriation programmes across State boundaries.

UNHCR pays tribute to the work, contribution and sacrifices of thousands of humanitarian de-miners in mine affected countries. We acknowledge the technical expertise that we have received from the demining community for clearing mine fields and unexploded ordinance in areas of refugee return. This cooperation has allowed thousands of people to go home and re-start their lives in safety and dignity.

In closing, UNHCR reiterates its support for mine action issues and continues to advocate at the highest level for the political and financial support to remove this scourge of inhumanity that has contributed to so much misery and suffering

Thank you for your attention, Mr. President .
