

**Address by Mr. Xavier DARCOS, French Minister of State for
Cooperation, Development and Francophony, at the 1st Review Conference
of the Convention on the prohibition of use, Stockpiling, Production and
Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction**

Nairobi, 2nd December 2004

**Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me to express my joy and pride today to be representing my country and to be amongst you during this important event, more than five years after the signing of the Ottawa Convention.

I would like to pay tribute to the United Nations and Non Governmental Organizations who have spearheaded the struggle for this prohibition, and particularly the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), whose actions were recognized by the awarding of a Nobel Peace Prize.

What brings us together today is our common fight against one of the most cruel scourge that mankind has ever known. Anti-Personnel mines continue to kill or maim thousands of people every year in the world, affecting mainly civilian populations, often long after the armed conflicts have ceased. Their proliferation constitutes a major factor of destabilisation and a hindrance to development.

Since the Ottawa Convention, France's action has been focused on three major principles.

The first among them is exemplarity

France was one of the first signatories, on 3rd December 1997, and the first among the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to ratify the Convention, on the 23rd July 1998.

Since then, France has fulfilled, within a very short time, all her obligations, in particular through :

- the quick adoption of national implementation measures, including the law of 8th July 1998 "on the elimination of Anti-Personnel Land Mines";
- the adoption of specific provisions for the French Armed Forces, including the Army Chief of Staff directive dated 12th November 1998 ;
- the completion of stockpile destruction of Anti-Personnel land mines by 20th December 1999, three years in advance of the deadline prescribed by the Ottawa Convention.

Finally, we have appointed an Ambassador in charge of mine clearance and assistance to mine victims.

The second principle is Transparency

Since the beginning of 1999, France has put in place a National Commission for the Elimination of Anti-Personnel Mines (CNEMA for the French acronym), whose Chairperson, Ms Brigitte Stern, is here with us today.

First and foremost, the role of this Commission has been to follow up the implementation of the French enforcement law of the Ottawa Convention. Today, it concentrates on the international action by France with regard to victim assistance and mine clearance operations. Last March, it organized an international seminar in Paris on how national government's structures approach mine action. It was attended by 31 State Parties to the Convention.

The Commission, which is made up of representatives from civil society and the State, has facilitated close collaboration between all those, in France, who participate in the fight against anti-personnel mines.

The third and last principle is about solidarity

From 1996, France was considered humanitarian mine clearance a development issue.

Since 1996, France has contributed more than 13 million Euros in bilateral aid to support its commitments. The amount will be multiplied by five to include her contributions to the European Commission programmes, which range from 17 to 25 per cent according to the instruments.

Often undertaken on the ground by non governmental organizations, like *Handicap International*, these projects deal with mine clearance of contaminated sites, assistance in the destruction of stockpiles, assistance to mine victims and training in techniques of mine clearance.

On this last issue, I would like to make a quick comment on the regional Centre for Mine Clearance located in Ouidah (Benin). The objective of this school, which was opened last year within the framework of French military and defence cooperation, is to train African interns in mine clearance techniques. Classes are conducted in French and English. 80 trainees have already graduated.

Moreover, I am happy to confirm to you the launching in 2005 of two supplementary programmes of mine clearance and assistance to victims :

- one which will benefit Angola, at a cost of 3 million Euros;
- and the other destined for East African countries at a cost of 2 million Euros .

By respecting these three principles, France has two objectives.

The first concerns the reinforcement of international humanitarian law.

In this regard, France intends to continue to take part in the efforts of the international community. She is convinced that the Ottawa Convention constitutes an essential instrument

for protecting civilian populations, their social and economic development, and securing international stability and disarmament.

France is, as such, committed to a complementary framework, namely the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Protocols, which brings together the main world powers. After the extension in December 2001 of the scope of this Convention to internal conflicts, the State Parties adopted in 2003 a new Protocol V on explosive remnants of war. They also committed themselves to enhance talks on the issue of other types of mines apart from Anti-Personnel Mines.

The second objective is universalization

Synonymous with hope, the Ottawa Convention contained a promise: that of a world free of Anti-Personnel Mines. From then on, the international community equipped itself with means to translate into action its fight for a just cause. Since that time, the progress achieved has been considerable.

With 144 State Parties today, the Ottawa Convention has achieved major success in a short time: notable reduction of the production of Anti-Personnel Mines, end of Transfers, stabilization of the number of new mines victims, a better understanding by the international community of the scope of problems caused by this scourge, and, finally, an enhanced coordination of efforts. These results must now be consolidated.

Convinced that the total elimination of Anti-Personnel Mines must be truly attained, France intends to work towards the reinforcement of the integrity, credibility and therefore the efficiency and scope of the Ottawa Convention. It is in this direction that we should aim, and not at an attempt of an uncertain revision of the Convention's foundations.

Indeed, let us not forget that, regardless of the distance covered, a lot remains to be done. I am thinking, in particular, of the fact that major powers remain outside the convention. This means that half of the planet remains outside the prohibition scope of the Ottawa Convention. This tends to compromise its efficiency. The world stockpiles are still estimated at more than 200 million mines. More than 80 countries are still affected by this scourge.

Mr. Chairman,

The fight against Anti-Personnel Mines is a permanent one. We have to acknowledge the progress made so far. All the same, we must not relax our efforts. To the contrary, our duty is to persevere. We are encouraged by the progress achieved.

Aware of the extent and the seriousness of the challenges ahead, France will pursue her fight with determination and commitment, in order to contribute to a safer world.

In this regard, we are determined. The struggle against the Anti-Personnel Mines will attain its objective – total elimination of these inhuman arms – only when the prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines rallies the largest number of States and, among these, the principle producer or user countries. Universalization of the Treaty is the condition for success in our endeavour.

Thank you./.