

Press Release of 26 May 2000:

New leadership at the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga elected Head of the Council of the Foundation "Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining" in place of former Federal Councillor René Felber, and Ambassador Martin Dahinden replaces Ambassador François Godet as Director of the Centre. François Godet to help set up the planned "Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces".

At its meeting of 26 May 2000, the Council of the Foundation "Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining" (GICHD) has, with regret, taken note of the wish of its President, former Federal Councillor René Felber, to step down as President of the Council- a position that Mr. Felber held since 1998. The Foundation Council thanks Mr. Felber for his important contribution to the creation and development of the Centre.

Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga, former State Secretary and, until the end of last year, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been elected the new President of the GICHD's Council. Dr. Sommaruga was one of the key initiators and a driving force behind the Ottawa process that led to the Convention prohibiting anti-personnel mines. He is internationally acclaimed for his profound knowledge of the problems posed by anti-personnel mines.

At the same meeting, the Council took note, with regret, of the wish of the Director of the GICHD, Ambassador François Godet, to take up new challenges, after four years devoted to the prohibition of anti-personnel mines and humanitarian demining. As of June 2000, François Godet will be a member of the team establishing and developing the future Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces.

The Council has elected Ambassador Martin Dahinden as new Director of the Centre. Martin Dahinden was Minister and Deputy Head of the Swiss Mission to NATO in Brussels since 1998.

Furthermore, the Council decided to internationalise the Bureau of the Foundation and elected one representative from both Norway and the United Kingdom as members of the Bureau.

The GICHD was founded in late 1997 and has acquired an excellent international reputation. Today, 17 states as well as the Canton of Geneva are represented in the Foundation Council. The electronic "Information Management System for Mine Action", developed by the GICHD, has set a world-wide standard in this domain. Since 1998 the GICHD organises, together with the United Nations, an annual conference of all Mine Action Centres. These meetings are now regarded as indispensable. The Centre's Think Tank makes important contributions to the United Nations and the international community. The GICHD's success is also evidenced by the fact that the States party to Mine Ban Treaty (prohibition of anti-personnel mines) have charged the GICHD with the provision of secretarial support for the follow-up process. Early on in the Kosovo conflict, the GICHD was able to give substantial assistance to KFOR, the United Nations and other organisations active in humanitarian demining.

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