



Press release

Geneva, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2003

**Agreement between the Federal Council and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining**

Today, Federal Councillor, Mrs. Micheline Calmy-Rey, and the President of the Council of Foundation of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), Mr. Cornelio Sommaruga, have signed an agreement on the status of the Centre in Switzerland. With this agreement, the Federal Council confers to the Centre a legal capacity and certain immunities, necessary for the accomplishment of its mandate, recognizing at the same time its independence.

The agreement has become necessary after the GICHD received a mandate, in Managua in 2001, from the States-Parties to the Anti-Personnel (AP) Mine Ban Convention (Ottawa Convention). The mandate asked the GICHD to establish an Implementation Support Unit to provide secretariat support for the implementation of the AP Mine Ban Convention.

The Threat of Anti-personnel Landmines

Despite all the efforts in the 1990s, the threat of anti-personnel landmines remains a major humanitarian challenge. About 80 countries suffer daily from this hazard. Landmines block the distribution of humanitarian aid as well as post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The return of refugees is hampered and agriculture land cannot be cultivated. Moreover, many mine victims need medical assistance and economic support throughout their life.

The AP Mine Ban Convention is the starting point to look for answers to all these problems. It entails a total ban on anti-personnel landmines and exhorts states to a concerted approach aimed at providing a solution to the suffering caused by landmines. Today, 131 States have ratified the AP Mine Ban Convention.

Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining subscribes fully to the principles and obligations entailed in the AP Mine Ban Convention. Its activities go beyond the mandate conferred by the States Parties.

By stressing the principle of local capability building, the GICHD is actively engaged, as an independent and impartial institution, in concrete problems encountered in the field.

Most of the GICHD's resources are mobilised for the support of projects, through its experts and products (technical expertise, soft-ware information management, development of international mine action standards, training, etc.).

Moreover, the Centre runs a demand-driven research programme aimed at solving problems encountered, or improving on suggestions, by practitioners working in the field.

The GICHD was founded under a Swiss initiative at the signature of the AP Mine Ban Convention in 1997. The Centre is a foundation by Swiss private law. Eighteen government representatives are part of the Council of Foundation.

The Centre works closely with the United Nations, with mine-affected countries, as well as with non-governmental organisations. Half of its budget is financed by the Swiss Federal Department of Defence (VBS/DDPS), the remaining half by contributions of other governments. At present the GICHD has 30 staff from 13 different countries.

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Annexes

- Déclaration du Président du Conseil de Fondation, Centre international de déminage humanitaire – Genève, à l'occasion de la signature de l'Accord entre le CIDHG et le Conseil fédéral relatif au statut du Centre en Suisse
- Brochure (d/f)
- Information Sheet (d/f)
- Update of Activities– December 2002 (e)
- Brochure Expo.02 (d/f)