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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 18th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 27 October 2005, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Gujadhur (Vice-Chairman) . . . . . (Mauritius)

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Agenda item 27: Assistance in mine action (*continued*)

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*In the absence of the Chairman, Mr. Gujadhur (Mauritius), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 27: Assistance in mine action (continued)**

1. **Mr. Gaspar Martins** (Angola) said that more financial and technical resources clearly had to be mobilized for mine action, especially to help countries emerging from long conflicts.

2. The forthcoming Sixth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction would offer an opportunity to assess progress since its adoption. A great many mines had in fact been cleared, the number of victims had fallen significantly in some countries, and more attention was being paid to helping survivors. The Meeting should, however, also set a clear agenda for dealing with the critical problems still faced by mine affected countries. Universal adherence to the Convention was crucial to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. In Angola, one of the most seriously mine affected countries in the world, landmines were impeding humanitarian and development work, endangering lives and hindering economic recovery. During the 27 years of civil war, 7 million landmines had been laid and virtually no record had been maintained as to their whereabouts. Most villages still remained inaccessible because of mined roads and, as a result, farmers could not transport produce to markets and refugees could not return to their homes. Reconstruction was hampered and the forthcoming elections would also be compromised.

4. With the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the international community, including non-governmental organizations, however, the Government had begun to tackle the problem. Having ratified the Convention, it had allocated substantial budget funds to mine action operations and was regularly updating them to reflect new strategies. Since 1996, Angola had with its partners, surveyed or marked thousands of kilometres and demined millions of square metres, and had destroyed almost 700,000 mines and unexploded ordnance. It had begun to educate the public about the risk of mines, and was emphasizing the physical rehabilitation of mine

victims. Angola was one of some 30 countries which had in 2004 founded the Forum of Mine-Affected Countries, which were working together to identify ways of dealing with the landmine crises while at the same time working with the United Nations, the donor community and civil society. The previous year's report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/59/284) had recognized that donors should support mine action from their development and reconstruction budgets as well as their humanitarian emergency budgets.

5. The United Nations Mine Action Service had played a crucial coordinating role. Indeed, effective coordination and increased national ownership were fundamental to the success of mine action.

6. **Mr. Takase** (Japan) said that the First Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention — the 2004 Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World — had been the most significant event since the Convention had come into effect and that the Action Plan adopted at the Summit would set the course for the following five years.

7. At the Nairobi Summit, Japan, which thus far had contributed almost \$200 million to more than 30 mine affected countries throughout the world, had announced that its new mine action policy for the following five years would emphasize the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Its mine action would follow three principles: consolidation of peace, human security and close cooperation between Governments, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia.

8. Japan had always supported mine action as a way of providing assistance to countries in the wake of conflict and it was currently helping to consolidate peace in Sudan in the fields of mine clearance and emergency response. It also attached importance to victim assistance and mine risk education with a view to protecting and empowering people and had set up a human security grant aid scheme to support activities in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and many other countries. The entire mine action sector in Japan was, moreover, involved in devising effective mine detection and clearance equipment and in the research and development of new and advanced technologies.

9. Under its new policy, Japan had already extended assistance to 32 projects in 12 countries on mine clearance, victim assistance and mine risk education. It

was aware of the need to integrate mine action into its development programme, strategy and budget, in order to provide the comprehensive and flexible approach that was needed.

10. **Ms. Juul** (Norway) said that the Mine Ban Convention had come about as a humanitarian response to a humanitarian crisis. Six years later, her delegation noted with satisfaction the substantial progress that had been made under all articles, including those relating to humanitarian mine action and victim assistance. There was, however, still reason for concern: in 50 out of 60 mine affected countries, survivor assistance was not adequate to meet the needs of new victims. Article 5 of the Convention made it obligatory for all States parties to clear all mines within 10 years of the entry into force for them of the Convention; and the forthcoming Sixth Meeting of States Parties should consider how to facilitate fulfilment of the obligations under article 5 so as to reach the goal of a mine-free world. The primary responsibility, of course, lay with the mine affected countries; the international community's contributions could only be supplemental. National ownership and coordination of mine action operations was essential. From the start of course, unique partnerships had been forged between mine affected countries, other States parties and non-governmental and international organizations, and those partnerships would continue to be important.

11. The vast majority of mine survivors were civilians, many of them children, and the families and communities of the victims were also affected. Victim assistance must therefore be broad in scope, involve the victims themselves in the process, and include both general health services and the reintegration of people with disabilities into active life, while offering support to their communities. Those were long-term commitments that had to be part of a country's general development plans and strategies.

12. Within the framework of the Convention, Norway, together with Nicaragua, had chaired the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration, which in the past year had focused on developing national capacities and, in accordance with the victims' own stated preferences, had concentrated on two issues: trauma care and socio-economic rehabilitation. Workshops organized in some of the 24 most mine affected countries in Africa and Central America had helped to establish national action plans for support to mine victims. In 2002, Norway had

initiated the establishment of a resource mobilization contact group under the Convention. Current funding levels had to be maintained and new sources of funding secured, and funds had to be used in the most cost-effective way. Norway would continue to concentrate its own support on mine clearance, while at the same time involving and developing local capacity based on national and local ownership. It was one of her country's priorities to ensure that its support for mine action was gender sensitive; it believed that it was important to secure the participation of women in all areas of mine action.

13. The hallmark of the landmine process was the way it combined field experience and political action. That practical and operational approach must also guide future work.

14. **Ms. Holguín Cuéllar** (Colombia) said that, just as terrorist acts must be condemned, the manufacture and marketing of anti-personnel mines must be prohibited, for they too caused destruction, death and mutilation, and did so indiscriminately. Often, illegal terrorist armed groups funded by transnational organized crime were responsible for laying mines. Mine clearance was crucial in conflict and post-conflict situations.

15. Colombia had destroyed its stock of more than 18,000 anti-personnel mines, but demining was also essential as a component of a comprehensive policy of land recovery that would ensure the security of its rural sectors. The armed forces had small demining teams, but other smaller groups were being formed to accelerate the work.

16. Her Government was also developing a mine risk education strategy, involving non-governmental organizations, local authorities, community leaders and the public. A general register of mine victims had been kept since 1990 and a list of individual cases since 2005, in order to monitor prompt victim assistance. Priority was being given to comprehensive care for child and adolescent victims and international funds had been donated for the remodelling of certain hospitals for the purpose.

17. Colombia very much appreciated the international cooperation it had received. The complexity of the problem created by anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance required the involvement of all State authorities and civil society in Colombia and, of course, international cooperation in

coordination with the Government's own national strategic plan.

18. **Mr. Getachew** (Ethiopia) said that his country attached considerable importance to the issue of mine action, recognizing it as an essential element of the humanitarian and development activities of the United Nations, in which the Mine Action Service played a key role.

19. Ethiopia had acceded to the Ottawa Convention in 2004, believing that doing so would help to create the momentum for its universal ratification. The growing number of ratifications by Member States had created a strong moral impetus in establishing rules that restrained States as well as non-State actors from using anti-personnel land mines.

20. Ethiopia, with 2 million land mines and items of unexploded ordnance throughout the country and with 1.9 million of its people living in mine-infested areas, was among the most mine affected countries in the world. According to a nationwide survey completed in March 2004, mine and unexploded ordnance incidents had killed 588 people and injured 737 between 2002 and 2004 alone.

21. The presence of landmines had a crucial impact on development. They impeded productive activities, particularly in rural areas. The need for mine clearance activities placed tremendous financial pressure on the public budget, which was already subject to daunting competition among priorities. Ethiopia had undertaken various forms of mine action aimed at resolving the problem. The Ethiopian Mine Action Office, established with the mandate of carrying out humanitarian demining and related activities, had overseen the clearance of 17.9 million square metres of land, the destruction of 18,330 landmines and items of unexploded ordnance, and the provision of landmine risk education to 2,388,084 people. As a result of those activities, accidents from mines had been reduced significantly and a considerable number of people had been able to return to their homes to resume their normal lives.

22. As recent survey findings indicated, however, landmines and items of unexploded ordnance remained scattered in many parts of the country; that was a clear indication of the need to boost mine action. In view of the scale of the problem and the Government's limited resources and technical capability, it would have been quite difficult for the country to tackle it without help

from the international community, to which he expressed his country's gratitude for its generous and ongoing support.

23. **Mr. Morote** (Peru) said that for several years, his delegation had expressed Peru's political will to bring about the total eradication of anti-personnel mines, since they were an inhumane weapon. It was imperative to put an end to the suffering they caused, mutilating and killing hundreds of people every day around the world, mostly innocent and defenceless civilians, especially children and women. Mines obstructed economic development, delaying and increasing the cost of reconstruction. They inhibited the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced people, not only during conflicts but also in post-conflict situations, making it difficult for the country to forget and reconcile and to rebuild international trust, peace and stability for the long term.

24. The Ottawa Convention was the leading international instrument in the fight against anti-personnel mines. As with any human endeavour, there was much work still to do. His delegation hoped that more countries would join the 144 States that were already parties to the Convention.

25. His delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (A/59/284), notably its conclusions, namely, that there was a need to integrate a development perspective into mine action planning, to emphasize the role of mine affected communities when determining mine action priorities, and to address gender concerns in the design, implementation and evaluation of mine action programmes. It also agreed that United Nations efforts had encouraged increased cooperation among mine affected States. His delegation had participated actively in the discussions on the draft resolution, and intended to join the sponsors.

26. He drew attention to the joint experience of Peru and Ecuador in humanitarian mine clearance as a confidence-building measure and as part of the fight against poverty and of the national development effort, particularly in the areas affected by mines along the common frontier. As it had done at the First Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention, in November 2004, Peru wished to report on progress in its bilateral agreements. Peru and Ecuador would continue to carry out joint projects; execute joint reconnaissances; exchange technical experience, equipment and

information on possible dangerous areas; plan combined mine clearance operations; share medical evacuation plans; undertake joint prevention campaigns; and share information. The results of the shared experience confirmed that such cooperation strengthened peaceful relations and provided a shared vision of the problems and solutions. Together, Ecuador and Peru could protect their populations, particularly their indigenous populations, from the scourge of mines. To continue their work, they would need the sustained and invaluable support of the international community, the United Nations, its agencies and international bodies. Peru was grateful to countries such as Canada and the United States and to intergovernmental organizations such as the Organization of American States, the European Union and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as to the Geneva Centre for International Humanitarian Demining, for their support over several years. Joint humanitarian mine clearance would unite and strengthen Peruvians and Ecuadorians. Now was the time to renew the ties of bilateral and international cooperation, and to reaffirm the conviction that signing the Ottawa Convention had been the right way to bring about a mine-free world.

27. **Ms. Mladineo** (Croatia) said that, to its misfortune, Croatia's period of independence virtually coincided with the length of time it had been affected by mine-related problems. It had progressed a long way from being a country with serious problems with mine affected areas, to one that had learned to deal with those problems, including their humanitarian, social and economic effects. Much of that progress had come through the painful process of learning from experience, often at the expense of the personal losses of the brave deminers who had taken it upon themselves to cleanse their country of such terrible relics of war. At the same time, the substantial assistance of the international community and the United Nations had been very important, and Croatia gratefully acknowledged it.

28. Great importance had been attached to education and training for all the actors involved: from mine experts to ordinary people living in the mine affected areas. Croatia had established the Mine Action Academy-International Studies of Humanitarian Demining, at the Polytechnic College of Velika Gorica. The Croatian Mine Action Centre had been established, incorporating the Centre for Testing of Demining

Machines and Equipment. Workshops such as "Children in a Mined Environment" which had been organized for pupils at elementary schools, were evidence of the fruitful cooperation among the Croatian Mine Action Centre, the Red Cross, local authorities and the schools themselves.

29. Croatia was fully aware of the need to share its knowledge and experience, and had participated in intensive international cooperation in every element of mine action. The importance it attached to such cooperation stemmed not only from the obligations it had undertaken in ratifying the Ottawa Convention, or its position as a factor of regional stability, but also from its belief that mine action was an area where its national experience could assist others. The establishment of the Council for Coordination of Mine Action Activities had developed an already fruitful exchange of knowledge and experience within south-east Europe. Such regional cooperation was a milestone on the road to a mine-free world, and Croatia stood ready to share its experience with any mine affected country or region.

30. The forthcoming Sixth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, to be held in Croatia later in the year, would offer not only another chance to proceed further along the road towards a mine-free world, but also an opportunity to measure further progress towards the full implementation of the goals of the Ottawa Convention, and to appeal once again to those countries that had not yet done so to recognize and comply with the Convention's simple message of a safer world.

31. **Mr. Ahmad** (Pakistan) expressed the view that the discussion needed to be focused on humanitarian demining, including assistance in mine clearance and the rehabilitation of mine victims, as well as the raising of awareness and national capacity-building in mine affected States with regard to modern demining techniques. The development and implementation of the policies, strategies and activities of the Organization related to mine action must be approved and reviewed by the Member States. Any attempt, direct or indirect, to impose treaty obligations on non-States parties in the name of assistance in mine clearance and mine action should not be allowed.

32. Pakistan supported the eventual elimination of anti-personnel mines. It had, however, been unable to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty because of its legitimate

security concerns. It would be difficult to bring about a universal ban on landmines unless and until viable alternatives were available. In the interim, Pakistan was favourably disposed towards negotiating an international legal instrument banning the transfer of anti-personnel landmines at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

33. Pakistan was a party to amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which allowed responsible uses of landmines. Consistent with its obligations under the Protocol, Pakistan had regulated the use of anti-personnel mines, by, inter alia, effectively excluding civilians from mined areas through marking, fencing and monitoring. It had produced only detectable anti-personnel mines since 1 January 1997, and had declared a voluntary unilateral moratorium on the export of landmines in March 1997.

34. Millions of civilians were still threatened by unexploded mines and ordnance, which placed a heavy burden on the social and economic reconstruction of war-ravaged countries. It was therefore clearly necessary to put more resources and efforts into mine clearance operations, and into socio-economic rehabilitation and development.

35. His delegation spoke on the issue on the basis of his country's accomplished record of contribution to the collective effort. Known for their high professional standards, Pakistani troops had been confidently employed by the United Nations in various humanitarian demining operations, with excellent results. Pakistani peacekeeping contingents had also voluntarily offered to assist local authorities in mine clearance. Pakistan had also participated in demining operations under United Nations auspices in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Eastern Slovenia, Kuwait, Somalia and Western Sahara. It had also provided training assistance for humanitarian demining in Sri Lanka, and would be contributing to the mine clearance operations in the Sudan.

36. From its experience in demining, Pakistan had drawn several conclusions: a response signal of 8 grams or more of iron was not the only method to ensure the detectability of mines; mines laid by professional armed forces, if duly marked, fenced and monitored, remained 100 per cent detectable to the user and posed minimum humanitarian risk; technologically advanced mine detectors ensured effective demining,

even of non-detectable mines; and the detectability of mines other than anti-personnel mines was not linked to the success of humanitarian demining operations. Moreover, although demining of areas being fought over by warring factions was admittedly difficult, Pakistan's experience had proved that an integrated approach like the one practised in Angola and Kuwait, while time-consuming, labour-intensive and fraught with dangers for the deminers, could overcome the difficulties and achieve the desired objectives.

37. In conclusion, he said his delegation hoped that all Member States would keep the humanitarian dimension of the issue foremost in their considerations and that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

38. **Ms. Meyer** (Canada) said that landmines and explosive remnants of war continued to litter many countries around the world. They posed a direct threat to life and limb, inhibited the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, and presented a major obstacle to sustainable development. Despite great progress in recent years, they continued indiscriminately to kill or injure 15,000 to 20,000 people annually; that was 1,500 casualties a month, 40 casualties a day, or at least 2 new casualties an hour, in direct victims alone. Many more suffered and died because of the indirect but no less lethal impact of landmines. A child who died of malnutrition in an area where landmines prevented access to vital agricultural land was as much a mine victim as the child who was struck down directly.

39. The Ottawa Convention remained, for Canada and the other 147 States parties, the definitive international instrument within which to address all elements of mine action. At the First Review Conference of the Convention — the 2004 Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World — States parties had developed an ambitious and visionary 70-point Nairobi Action Plan that would guide activities for the following five-year period. Her country looked forward to the Sixth Meeting of States Parties, which was to take place in Croatia later in the year, as a further means of measuring the progress made towards the realization of the Convention's humanitarian goals.

40. Canada greatly appreciated the efforts of those engaged in mine action globally, including many States that were not yet parties to the Convention. It stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination to

ensure the most effective utilization of resources, building on national capacity wherever possible. Special appreciation was due to the United Nations — in particular the Mine Action Service, UNDP and UNICEF — to the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva Centre for International Humanitarian Demining and the non-governmental organizations that engaged in mine action. Canada also recognized the initiatives undertaken by mine affected States to build national capacity for mine action, including their provision of financial resources. It also commended the engagement by States emerging from conflict in joint mine action and mine clearance activities as a confidence-building measure.

41. Although the United Nations had not yet adopted a formal definition of mine action, it was widely understood within the mine action community — within and outside the Ottawa process — to include the following five main elements: humanitarian demining, stockpile destruction, mine risk education, victim assistance, and advocacy for all aspects of mine action. To save lives in the short term, it was often necessary to survey and mark the location of landmines and to make people aware of their dangers until the painstaking and expensive clearance operations could be carried out. There was also an ongoing need to meet the needs of landmine survivors. For those and other reasons, it was essential always to refer to “mine action”, which included, but was not limited to, mine clearance.

42. Canada had contributed in excess of \$200 million to mine action since the Ottawa Convention had entered into force in 1999, mostly from the dedicated Canadian Landmine Fund. Increasingly, however, the Canadian International Development Agency was contributing funds for mine action from Canada’s official development assistance envelope, as an effective means of helping to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, Canada strongly encouraged mine affected States to build mine action into their national development plans and into all relevant sector strategies; to invest the resources they were able to in mine action, and to bring mine action forward as a development priority in negotiations with the international development community where the degree of landmine contamination warranted it. Those steps would diversify the resource base for mine action, help to meet mine action targets, and contribute

to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

43. **Mr. Gebreel** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy had failed to shoulder their responsibility for clearing the landmines which they had planted on his country’s soil during the Second World War. Thousands of deaths and injuries had been caused by those landmines and other explosive remnants of war, which had also prevented the reclamation and cultivation of extensive areas of Libyan land. States which planted mines had the prime responsibility for assisting in their clearance by providing maps, equipment and technology, as well as expert help in rehabilitating those disabled by such mines. His country wished to state that any resolution adopted on the subject should encompass that responsibility. A review of Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons was urgently required so that it could be amended to deal with the effects of war remnants from the first half of the twentieth century and affirm the responsibility of States for the clearance of mines planted by them in the territory of other States.

44. **Mr. Ortega** (Ecuador) said that his country shared the Organization’s vision of a world completely free of landmines. It considered mine action to be both a disarmament and a development issue which deserved the international community’s support. Ecuador’s mine action initiatives, undertaken with assistance from Canada and the United States as part of the Integral Action against Anti-personnel Mines of the Organization of American States, had been exemplary. Ecuador and Peru were the only countries in the region which had successfully carried out joint post-conflict mine action, including the exchange of information, thereby enabling neighbouring sections of their population to travel and work in safety. The international community should continue to provide financial support, especially for Member States in post-conflict situations. Ecuador, which had destroyed all its stocks of anti-personnel mines, called for universal adherence to the Ottawa Convention. It hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus and welcomed initiatives undertaken to that end by the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union.

45. **Mr. Thema** (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/59/284) clearly

outlined the tasks ahead. All States members of the Community had acceded to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Countries in the region had suffered from the deployment of landmines, anti-tank mines and unexploded ordnance in their territories and along their borders during civil wars and in the course of the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles. The prevalence of landmines had in many cases stunted economic growth. The Southern African Development Community therefore urged the international community to provide resources to fight the use of landmines, which — along with small arms and light weapons — were a scourge in the region.

46. Although many countries devoted resources to mine action, such as mine clearance programmes and victim assistance operations, much remained to be done. Diplomatic efforts to convince ever more States to join in the fight should continue and it was important to address the responsibility of those still engaged in the production, stockpiling, export and use of landmines. The members of SADC welcomed the African Union declaration on the common African position on anti-personnel landmines adopted at the Second Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines in 2004; they welcomed the continuous growth in the number of States parties to the Ottawa Convention; and they supported the Nairobi Action Plan for the period 2005-2009 formulated at the First Review Conference of States Parties to the Convention in 2004. Encouraged by the European Union's efforts, SADC urged States parties to implement the Convention and called upon other countries to accede to it. He hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus. Lastly, he commanded the work carried out by the Mine Action Service and by non-governmental organizations.

47. **Mr. Chaimongkol** (Thailand) was gratified that the objectives of the United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005 had been achieved and that the Organization was conducting a comprehensive review in order to achieve a more action-oriented and results-based strategy for the period 2006-2010. He welcomed the integrated approach that the Organization was taking with regard to mine action by coordinating the departments, programmes, funds and agencies concerned through the Mine Action Service and the Steering Committee on Mine Action.

48. With regard to the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, he emphasized the importance of mine action, particularly mine clearance, which could be essential in the initial stage of the peacebuilding process. Mine clearance was not only a confidence-building measure conducive to cooperation and effective coordination, but also a key to long-term post-conflict recovery and development. By demining and reclaiming land, which was an essential factor in production, post-conflict States could use the land for agriculture and road construction.

49. Thailand, which had destroyed its entire stockpile of anti-personnel mines in 2003, had steadily supported activities by government agencies and non-governmental organizations aimed at raising awareness of the danger and impact of landmines. In August 2004 it had organized a regional workshop on the Development Challenges of Mine Clearance and Victim Assistance in South-East Asia. Moreover, Thailand believed that landmine victims should be treated as assets rather than liabilities and allocated resources to provide victim assistance in the forms of hospital improvement and social reintegration programmes. The Thai Mine Action Centre had received support from the Japan Alliance for Humanitarian Demining Support since 2002, and from China, in the form of training and equipment, under a bilateral agreement on mine cooperation concluded in 2005. According to a joint survey by the Thai Mine Action Centre and the Norwegian People's Aid, Thailand had so far demined only about 0.13 per cent of its affected area of about 2,500 square kilometres. Much work still lay ahead and Thailand would welcome effective cooperation with the international community.

50. Along with other State parties to the Ottawa Convention, Thailand was determined to fulfil its commitments under the Nairobi Action Plan for the period 2005-2009. To that end, it was integrating mine action into its national development plans. It invited other States to do the same and urged donor countries to continue to contribute to the international humanitarian demining efforts.

*The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.*