



Eleventh International Meeting of Mine Action Programme Directors and UN Advisers

Statement by
Ambassador Stephan Nellen, Director GICHD

13 to 18 April 2008
Ljubljana

Dear friends,

Speaking to you today here in Ljubljana is special for me for two reasons. Most importantly, because it is the first time that the International Meeting of Mine Action Programme Directors and UN Advisers takes place outside Geneva, in a mine-affected region. Therefore, I would like to congratulate ITF and CROMAC, our longstanding friends and partners, for hosting this conference, and wish them full success. Secondly, it is the last time that I represent the GICHD at this conference, as my four-year term ends in mid-June and I will go back to the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I certainly will miss these meetings which brought me in contact with an important world of special people, and where I made many friends.

On its webpage, the ITF writes in its introductory remarks to this meeting that it represents an opportunity for stakeholders to *meet and assess the progress and challenges of the sector*. Indeed, we are experiencing today a period full of changes and transformations, coupled with new challenges. In order to keep Mine Action credible and up to date, as well as to keep going the necessary efforts with regard to the still many humanitarian concerns, we have to accurately assess the progress and the new challenges of the sector. This will be done in the coming days through dialogue and exchange of information among the participants, so I will not analyse them here. The GICHD is involved in a variety of projects and activities and I will mention

some, which we consider key for tackling the future challenges of the mine action sector.

On top of our priorities today is certainly our work in the area of land release, through both new technical and non-technical methods, with their enormous potential to increase productivity and to reach the objectives of the Mine Ban Convention faster. We have already made much progress, and will continue allocating important financial and human resources into research and into the provision of practical advice and support. It is our objective to assist mine affected countries, their national authorities and other organisations by increasing their efficiency and effectiveness in mine action through a substantial reduction of suspected areas.

We will also continue working with high priority to better link mine action and development. We have already published draft guidelines for the different actors, with the objective that they will be approved by DAC as soon as possible. Through our work, we will carry on with promoting better coordination between development aid and mine action, to make sure that it contributes to a maximum extent to social and economic development.

Information management remains a central piece of our work, and we will in the coming years continue installing and supporting the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), to assist planning, mapping, and analysis of data in mine-affected countries. Today, we have installed the system in more than 50 programmes. In the coming years, we will have to master the challenges of this growth, which puts a great strain on our financial resources, and we will do what we can to ensure that the system is used in a coordinated and decentralized way by all partners in a mine action programme.

In June, we will organise an international conference and bring together, in Norway, the best scientists, experts and practitioners from the world of animal detection. We expect that this conference will not only encourage an exchange of views among scientists and practitioners, but also become an

event that will help to promote a better understanding how animals detect landmines. I encourage those of you who are involved in managing or implementing dog or rat detection programmes, or have a special interest in this important clearance and technical survey technology to consider attending this conference. You can find more information about that conference on our web page.

The further professionalization of the mine action industry is a constant high priority for the GICHD. The continued development and adaptation of the IMAS, which we do on behalf of UNMAS, remains therefore another cornerstone of our work, which we complement with our support to national authorities in developing national standards, based on IMAS.

Finally, the GICHD is also constantly looking at its own relevance. In the first semester of this year, we will evaluate our work in technology and IMAS, and some of you might be interviewed by the external evaluator. We are also in the last year of our current 3-year strategy, and have started to update it for the coming years

I would like to end with a personal remark. In the last four years, I had the pleasure to deal with a group of incredible people who work with great motivation for a good cause. This is rare in a diplomat's career. I will leave my job enriched and humbled, having learned a lot from you that I can carry into my next assignment.

I wish you a good week in Slovenia and Croatia, and can assure you that the door is open to host the UNMAS meeting next year in Geneva again.

Thank you very much for your attention.
