

European Union Presidency
For the Dushanbe Workshop on Achieving a Mine Free Central Asia
7-8 July 2009

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

France, speaking on behalf of the current Swedish Presidency of the European Union, has the honour to welcome you to this regional workshop on achieving a mine-free Central Asia.

The European Union has a long history of support for the universalization and implementation of the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction – or Ottawa Convention. This unwavering support was reaffirmed in June 2008 when the Member States of the European Union adopted a Joint Action in support of the Convention.

Through this Joint Action, funds have been made available to support Tajikistan in convening this important workshop and in supporting up to five other States Parties to the Convention in convening workshops in advance of the Convention's Second Review Conference later this year. In the last half year 2 workshops already took place under the EU Joint Action: one in Nicaragua for the Americas and one in Thailand for South East Asia. Both were a success and I have every confidence that the Dushanbe Workshop will also be one. I should note as well that the EU Joint Action foresees that up to 25 short term technical advisory missions are undertaken to assist States Parties in addressing implementation challenges. Already 7 of these missions have taken place to Afghanistan, Uganda (two visits), Sudan, Chad, Zambia and Haiti covering a wide range of topics – from victim assistance to mine clearance.

The Ottawa Convention is comprehensive in that it seeks to end, for all people for all time, the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines. The Convention does not aim for half-measures. Rather, the Convention sees that the international community has agreed that the promise of ending the suffering forever will only be achieved if all mines are destroyed, if all mined areas are cleared, if all victims are assisted and if all States abide by the norms embodied by the Convention. The European Union stands behind this instrument, as evidenced at this workshop by the participation of several EU Member States, the EU Council Secretariat and the European Commission.

The European Union considers the Dushanbe Workshop an important step in both advancing the universalization and implementation aims of the States Parties and ensuring sound preparations are made for the Convention's Second Review Conference, the Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World. My colleagues and I hope that the States Parties in this region will make good use of this workshop to share experiences in clearing mined areas and assisting the victims. And we hope that those States of the region that have not yet joined our common cause will be encouraged by this workshop to proceed with their accession processes.

We commend the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and his officials and in particular the Tajikistan Mine Action Center, who have worked tirelessly to prepare this workshop. In addition, we thank the AP Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit for serving as technical implementer of the EU's Joint Action in support of the Convention.

Our hope is that this workshop will permit participants too expand contacts and intensify the work at a regional level. We have before us an intense program of work. I am sure that all participants will know how best to take advantage of the opportunity that this workshop represents and to thus contribute to the success of the Joint Action of the European Union, which is non other that the universalization of the Convention and the application of all its provisions for the benefit of a safer world and a world free of mines.

I wish you all the best for a successful workshop.