



GENEVA CALL

Press Release

Geneva, 9 August 2006

The Chin National Front of Burma renounces the use of anti-personnel mines

Geneva, 10 August 2006 – Geneva Call's action in Burma/Myanmar progresses as the Chin National Front (CNF) and its military wing, the Chin National Army (CNA), have committed to a total ban on anti-personnel (AP) mines by signing Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment on 31 July, in the Alabama Room, in the City Hall of Geneva.

The CNF/CNA was formed in 1988 to fight for the self-determination of the Chin people to restore democracy and establish a federal union of Burma. At their General Party Congress in 1997, the CNF adopted a military code of conduct, which was based on the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. The Code of Conduct limited the use of landmines but did not provide for a total ban. "The signing of Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment is thus a natural extension and an improvement of their commitment to the principles of international humanitarian law. It proves that even in the middle of a conflict the life of civilians can be taken into account as the most important thing," says Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey, President of Geneva Call.

"Our organisation has used anti-personnel mines. However, when we realised the consequences for our own people and the long-term impact of landmines in the post-conflict period, and following long discussions with Geneva Call, we acknowledged that we had to ban them," said Chairman Thomas Thang Nou. Col. Ral Hnin, CNA Chief of Staff, added that "Even though we are still fighting, we realise there are other ways in which we can protect our camps and defend our people without resorting to using these indiscriminate weapons,"

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) – Burma/Myanmar's government – and numerous armed ethnic opposition groups use anti-personnel mines in Burma, specifically in conflict areas along Burma/Myanmar's borders. The consequences of the use of these mines are dramatic as forty percent of landmine victims are civilians, though exact numbers are not available. In Chin State, around 50 square miles of land are uninhabitable due to the presence of landmines, resulting in thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees who have crossed the border into India and Bangladesh.

Dr. Suikhar, Secretary of External Affairs of the CNF laments "Leaders of both sides of the conflict focus on the military and political issues we are facing today, however, they overlook the impact of landmines both now and in the future" There is limited humanitarian mine action taking place in Burma/Myanmar today, despite the urgent need.

The CNF calls on the SPDC and other armed opposition groups to also ban the use of anti-personnel mines and to cooperate in mine action.

The CNF is the 30th armed non-state actor and second group in two weeks committing to the principles embodied in the DoC. This commitment is made by an NSA which hitherto has been using AP mines. Geneva Call sees this as an example of the feasibility of signing the DoC even as hostilities are ongoing.

Geneva Call congratulates the CNF for its important decision contributing to build a mine free world.

Geneva Call is an international humanitarian organisation dedicated to engaging armed non-state actors in mine-ban action. It provides a mechanism, complementary to the Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction (the Ottawa Convention), which can only be signed by State actors. The armed non-state actors can adhere to the ban on AP mines through their signature of Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment. This document, drafted in the same spirit as the Ottawa Convention, takes into account the specificities of armed non-state actors and is as such a tailor-made tool in the eradication process of AP mines.

