



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
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First Committee  
items 73, 77 and 80 of the agenda

**General and complete disarmament**

**Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional  
Weapons which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have  
Indiscriminate Effects**

**Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling  
of  
Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction**

Statement by the  
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

New York, 10 October 2003

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving the floor to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The recent Fifth Meeting of States Parties to **the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines** in Bangkok provides an inspiring example of the potential for addressing arms issues multilaterally when clear issues of life and death are being addressed and efforts are deeply rooted in international humanitarian law.

The Bangkok meeting brought together most of the 136 States Parties to the Convention, as well as nearly all major mine-affected countries, all major organisations involved in clearance, mine awareness, victim assistance and advocacy around the world and a considerable number of States not yet Parties to the Convention, particularly from the Asian region. The successes of the Convention are evident:

- according to the 2003 Landmine Monitor Report, 30 million mines have been destroyed by States Parties,
- stockpile destruction deadlines were met by all States whose deadlines have arrived,
- a massive reduction of mine casualties has been achieved where the Convention is being implemented, and
- a high level of political and resource mobilization is continuing to ensure the job is completed.

Adherence in the past year by Afghanistan and Angola, two of the most mine ravaged countries, by Greece, Turkey and Belarus, which possesses some four and a half million anti-personnel mines, were significant steps on the path to universalisation.

Parties to the Convention also addressed future challenges and began laying the basis for a successful Review Conference in Nairobi in December 2004. Mine-affected States were urged to present, before the Review Conference, plans, priorities and needs assessments for implementing mine action programs within the Convention's deadlines. All Parties were called upon to prepare plans, before the Review Conference, for the sustained mobilization of resources. The need for increased resources, particularly to fulfill the Convention's promises to landmine victims, was highlighted. The ICRC commends States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines for this impressive record and calls on all States which are not yet Parties to consider adherence to the Convention before the 2004 Review Conference.

The ever-growing global problem of **explosive remnants of war** deserves equally committed and urgent action by the international community. Next month's negotiations on a new international instrument in the context of the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons will be a crucial test of States' commitment to reducing the unacceptable levels of post-conflict death and injury from explosive remnants of war. The ICRC urges States Parties to come to these negotiations prepared to conclude a legally binding protocol which will include strong and effective obligations to clear or

assist in the clearance of explosive remnants of war, to provide the information needed by organisations conducting clearance or risk education programs, to warn civilians of the presence of explosive remnants of war and to provide assistance to victims. The protocol should also promote the adoption of measures to minimize the problem in future conflicts including technical measures to prevent munitions from becoming explosive remnants of war and correct practices for the handling and transport of munitions.

Recent armed conflicts have demonstrated the urgency of the explosive remnants of war problem. Each new conflict adds years, if not decades, to the burden of clearance and diverts resources needed to address the already overwhelming problems of currently affected areas. The human costs of explosive remnants of war will continue to escalate as the means to deliver huge quantities of munitions proliferate. States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons must take the opportunity of the November negotiations to stop and reverse this trend. The world cannot afford to face the costs of an ever-increasing burden of explosive remnants of war. New generations of victims must not pay the price with their lives or limbs because of a lack of consensus on how to proceed or because of a weak instrument.

The unregulated availability of arms, in particular of **small arms and light weapons**, remains a continuing concern of the ICRC. As we have stated previously, the implications for civilian populations, for respect for international humanitarian law and for the delivery of humanitarian assistance are grave. The recent biennial meeting on the UN Programme of Action on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons highlighted not only the important work that has begun nationally, regionally and internationally but also the need for more effective action. We urge all States to enact measures to ensure that their arms transfer laws and policies take into account respect for international humanitarian law. We also encourage States to focus more on the elements of the UN Programme of Action which address the demand for and use of small arms, including through measures such as training of arms bearers in international humanitarian law.

Mr. Chairman,

The ICRC launched its Appeal on **Biotechnology, Weapons and Humanity** one year ago. While we fully recognize the huge potential of biotechnology, we have doubled our efforts to raise awareness of the increasing risks it may pose for international norms against poisoning and the deliberate spread of disease. Our outreach has extended to the scientific and medical communities, the biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries, parliaments and the general public. Our work with governments has included a written contribution to the August meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts established by States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention and consultations hosted by our President on a proposed Ministerial Declaration on preventing the use of biological agents for hostile purposes. Such a high-level political declaration would reaffirm existing norms, reinforce efforts within the Biological Weapons Convention framework and highlight the responsibilities of science and industry. It would also support a variety of preventative actions commensurate with the risks posed by rapidly

developing capacities for misuse of biological agents. We invite all interested delegations to be in touch with us about these efforts.

In December the **28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent** will bring together all States Parties to the Geneva Conventions, all National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and their International Federation, and the ICRC. One of the four main subjects being considered will be arms and international humanitarian law, including all of the subjects we have mentioned here. We believe that the arms issues proposed for consideration are of particular urgency. They are subjects which highlight the relevance of international humanitarian law and represent fields where action by the International Conference can make a real difference. Success in the elaboration of the Conference's "Humanitarian Agenda for Action" in the arms field will depend upon the capacity of all participants to consider these issues not only from a purely "arms control" perspective but also from the viewpoint of the victims, who most frequently are civilians. It will challenge us to consider arms issues in light of the interests of humanity as a whole and in view of the universal responsibility to protect human dignity. We look forward to working with you in this effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.