Backgrounder

LAND MINES

It is estimated that there are currently 85 million land mines in place around the world. Each year indiscriminately laid land mines cause death and injury to thousands of people, mostly civilians.

The United Nations Convention which deals with the use of land mines came into force in 1983. Officially titled the Convention on Prohibition or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, the instrument is commonly referred to as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). It sets legally binding limits on certain types of weapons which if used in contravention of those limits, may be deemed to be illegitimate as weapons of war. At present, 66 countries have signed the CCW. Fifty-one countries have ratified. Canada ratified the convention in June 1994.

The first formal review of the CCW takes place in Vienna, September 25 to October 13, 1995. Negotiators have met at four preparatory conferences to lay the groundwork for the review conference.

Canada strongly supports increased restrictions on anti-personnel land mines, leading ultimately to a global ban on their use. Canada recognizes however, that a global ban is not yet achievable for a number of reasons. Land mines are low-cost, widely available and highly effective weapons which are used by most military forces around the world.

No Canadian firm is presently engaged in the manufacture of land mines. Canada has not exported any land mines since 1987, nor used any since the Korean War.

At the Vienna review conference, Canada will be working with like-minded countries to develop proposals aimed at strengthening and expanding the terms of the CCW. These include:

- Expanding the scope of the CCW to include internal conflicts, where most casualties occur;
- Requiring land mines to be detectable;
- Moving towards land mines that self-destruct or self-neutralize.
- Ensuring compliance with the Convention, through an effective verification mechanism;