

devastating humanitarian consequences of these weapons.

It was then that Canada decided that a total ban on AP mines was the only way to deal definitively with the AP mine crisis.

Canada offered its help to those who had already been working for so long to bring this issue to the top of the global agenda. In October, Canada hosted the first ever meeting of NGOs, international organizations and governments to discuss a strategy for banning AP mines. How much interest there would be was literally unknown.

But the international collective effort prevailed. ICBL partners — with Mines Action Canada and around the world — and the ICRC worked relentlessly to build interest and support for the October meeting. When the twenty country mark was reached, the momentum kicked in — the concern became the accommodation of these countries at the conference centre.

It was an inspiring gathering of 350 people from 75 countries, the UN, UNICEF, DHA, the ICRC and Federation of Red Cross Societies and, most importantly, dozens of NGOs representing hundreds of organizations worldwide.

At the conclusion of that meeting, Minister Axworthy issued his challenge to the global community: to return to Ottawa in December 1997 to sign a convention banning AP mines. Many delegations, even those supportive of a ban, were initially shocked by this ambitious timetable. But they realised, as had Canada, that there existed not only real momentum for a ban, but a special window of opportunity that had to be exploited.

The shock soon turned to delight and enthusiasm amongst ban supporters. It truly catalyzed national and international action and concentrated minds in a way that had been missing previously. And it provided a clear framework within which NGOs, governments and international agencies have been able to work effectively.

This then, is the Ottawa Process -- a diplomatic "fast track" designed to reach the goal of an AP mine ban by the end of this year.

The Canadian approach through the Ottawa Process is very simple:

- first: to take urgent action to fulfil the mandate given by the 156 countries which supported a resolution at the last UN General Assembly calling on the international community "to pursue vigorously an effective, legally-binding international agreement to ban the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of antipersonnel mines ..." At this point, halfway measures would not be considered. Use, above all, is the problem. Use must be banned.

- second: this effort is primarily humanitarian in nature; blinding laser weapons were banned entirely under the existing international humanitarian law instrument of the CCW. AP mines are not strategic weapons systems. They do not need to be treated like nuclear or chemical weapons. An effective AP mine ban can be negotiated quickly and simply. There are many precedents. Elaborate verification provisions are neither necessary nor feasible.

- third: all countries which share the Canadian objective of a total ban are invited to join in. The Ottawa Process is transparent and open to all -- but it will be hostage to none.

Why do we need an Ottawa Process?