

## Mexico City seminar brings the Americas together on mine action

A regional seminar on anti-personnel mines, co-hosted by Mexico and Canada in Mexico City on January 11-12, 1999, marked the first time states in the region have

port the border clearance as part of the peace agreements between these countries. Canada's contribution will be used to purchase equipment to improve the speed

was key to the speed and success of the Ottawa Process and the treaty banning anti-personnel (AP) mines," said Mr. Axworthy. "Action is needed to help this region as it continues to cope with the deadly legacy of the conflicts and instability of another era."

"The catastrophic devastation of Hurricane Mitch in the Central American region has not only created enormous human suffering, but has completely changed the mine situation of the region," said Madame Marleau.

There was hemispheric agreement on the importance of the OAS role in mine action and the need to double its resources. Countries were urged to contribute to the OAS registry as well as comply with article 7 of the Ottawa Convention. A push for rapid stockpile destruction was made as well as the announcement from various countries that they would indeed begin destroying their stocks prior to the 4 year deadline.

Seminar participants also pushed for early ratification in the region: Since the seminar, Costa Rica and El Salvador have ratified, bringing total ratifications in the region to 17 among 33 signatory states.

The seminar, entitled "Affirming our Commitments", brought government and NGO representatives from throughout the hemisphere together with international organizations and key donor countries. Mexican Foreign Minister Rosario Green and her Canadian counterpart, Lloyd Axworthy, inaugurated the meeting along with OAS Secretary General Gaviria, PAHO Director General Alleyne, and ICBL Ambassador Jody Williams.

come together to focus on mine action and mechanisms for practical cooperation.

Among the concrete outcomes of the seminar was an announcement by Peru and Ecuador that they would begin mine clearance along their shared border. This news was welcomed by regional partners and greeted with contribution announcements by donors. Canada pledged \$100,000 to sup-

and safety of Peruvian and Ecuadorian demining efforts.

Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy and Minister for International Co-operation and Minister responsible for La Francophonie Diane Marleau also announced a further \$1 million to support mine action projects in Nicaragua.

"The support of these countries, and this region in general,



ICBL Ambassador Jody Williams, PAHO Director General George Alleyne and Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy at the Mexico City Regional Seminar on AP Mines.

## Hurricane Mitch reverses progress on landmines

A detector works at locating mines displaced by Hurricane Mitch flood waters and mudslides.



Among the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch last November was a dramatic disruption of ongoing efforts to remove landmines in Central America.

The flooding and mudslides displaced a yet undetermined number - potentially thousands - of the more than 80,000 mines yet to be destroyed. This will certainly delay Central America's drive to free the region of mines by the year 2000.

In the last few years, the Organization of American States (OAS) had coordinated an extensive, internationally funded program to support the countries of Central America in their efforts to remove landmines left over from conflicts in the region. Hurricane Mitch has destroyed a substantial portion of the equipment and infrastructure used in this demining program.

In the aftermath of the storm, the OAS began a thorough re-eval-

uation of the landmine threat in the region. The forces of nature moved many mines down mountain slopes and riverbeds, and added large quantities of mud and debris to an already challenging

detection and destruction scenario. Until located and marked off, the displaced mines will continue to pose an immediate threat to public safety in the region.

- OAS

## British Army landmines destroyed

On February 23, British Defence Secretary George Robertson announced the completion of British Army AP landmine destruction. The last five deactivated mines were presented to Care International, the HALO Trust, the Mines Advisory Group, the British Red Cross and the Imperial War Museum.

In announcing the destruction, Mr. Robertson said, "I hope the accelerated destruction of British Army mines will send another clear and concrete message to those nations who have not yet

signed the Ottawa Treaty. The legacy of anti-personnel mines is a modern plague."

While the total number of mines destroyed was unreported, MAG UK estimates there were between .9 and 1.2 million AP mines prior to the destruction of the British Army Stocks. The British Ministry of Defence has set January 1, 2000 as a target for the destruction of all remaining British AP mines. A supplementary RAF JP233 stock of mines remains to be destroyed by this date.