

News Release

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CANADA TO PARTICIPATE IN REVIEW CONFERENCE ON CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Foreign Affairs Minister André Ouellet today announced that Canada will participate in the first formal review of what is commonly referred to as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). The conference, which deals, among other things, with the use of land mines, will take place in Vienna from September 25 to October 13.

"Canada strongly supports all efforts to increase international action on this important issue. Every year, thousands of innocent victims die or are injured by the millions of mines indiscriminately laid around the globe," said Mr. Ouellet.

The Canadian delegation to the conference will be led by Mark Moher, Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament. Canada will work to further strengthen and expand the terms of the CCW.

The CCW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1980 and came into force in 1983. It now has 66 signatories and has been ratified by 51 countries, including Canada.

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A background document is attached.

For further information, media representatives may contact:

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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;

- Introducing a legally-binding framework including conditions and restrictions on the export and transfer of anti-personnel land mines.
- Ensuring that there is the opportunity to further strengthen the Convention through an agreed review process.

Canada has been a leader in mine clearing, working in the past years to clear land mines that have been left after conflicts. For instance:

- Since 1993, Canada has supported mine clearance in Cambodia.
- Canada has also provided technical assistance in Cambodia and Angola, with the expertise of National Defence field engineers.
- National Defence researchers are also contributing to Canada's assistance by seeking new methods of detection and neutralization of land mines.
- Earlier this year, Canada contributed financially to the voluntary UN Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance.