



APPEL DE GENÈVE GENEVA CALL

Communiqué

Verification Mission to investigate allegations of landmine use by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines conducted

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A Geneva Call-led team of experts has just returned from the Philippines after conducting a Verification Mission into allegations that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) had breached its obligations under Geneva Call's *Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action* by using Anti-Personnel (AP) mines.

The MILF made a commitment to renounce the use of AP mines by signing the *Deed of Commitment* in 2000. It reaffirmed its commitment in 2002, and issued a statement clarifying the exact scope of the ban.

An escalation in the conflict between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the MILF in August 2008 brought with it allegations - reported in the media and elsewhere - that forces associated with the MILF were utilizing AP mines. During the period between August 2008 and May 2009 Geneva Call identified over 20 instances where landmine use was attributed by the GRP to the MILF. On enquiry, representatives of the GRP insisted that a number of these incidents involved the use of AP mines, devices prohibited under the Geneva Call *Deed of Commitment*. The MILF has consistently maintained that there had been no such use by its forces.

Geneva Call therefore sought - and received - approval from both the GRP and the MILF for a field verification of the allegations. Under Article 3 of the *Deed of Commitment*, signatories agree to "allow and cooperate in the monitoring and verification" of their adherence to the total ban on AP mines. Encouragingly, the GRP considered that facilitation of a Verification Mission would '*help to ensure the terms of the Mine Ban Treaty are abided by those who have made a solemn commitment of following its terms and conditions.*'

The Verification Mission took place between 17 and 26 November. The investigation team, led by Geneva Call, and including law Professor Eric David of Brussels University and Phil Halford, a technical specialist from the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), visited sites of alleged mine incidents in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao, inspected devices that had allegedly been recovered, interviewed witnesses and analysed documentary evidence. Representatives of the GRP and MILF Ceasefire Committees accompanied the Mission Team throughout its field enquiries, providing security and ensuring that the Mission Team was able to reach the locations of its enquiries. Nonviolent Peaceforce - an NGO with a strong field presence - provided logistical support and also accompanied the investigation team into the field, helping to emphasise the neutral and impartial nature of the enquiries.

'As far as I am aware, this is the first time in the history of international relations that such a fact-finding mission has been carried out with the agreement of, and facilitation by, both parties to an armed conflict, in casu, a State and a non-State actor' said Professor David.

The Mission Team is currently finalizing its findings. These will initially be shared with the MILF, with a summary report provided to the GRP. Further dissemination will be decided after consultation. Geneva Call would like to take this opportunity to thank both the GRP and the MILF for the excellent support and facilitation provided, and to the Kingdom of Belgium for sponsoring, the Verification Mission.

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