

**Statement of the International Committee of the Red Cross
to the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War**

9 November 2009

The adoption of the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War in 2003 established a new framework for addressing the human suffering caused by unexploded and abandoned ordnance. The Protocol aims to facilitate the rapid clearance of ERW and reduce the dangers to civilians until such clearance is completed. As has been shown by many conflicts, prompt action in the immediate aftermath of war can often help ensure that civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war are minimized.

In 2009, the Protocol's Group of Governmental Experts began to identify and address some of the important issues related to the Protocol's implementation. The ICRC commends the coordinators for their efforts and initiative in developing and managing a very substantive expert program. We are pleased that work has advanced on the tools developed by the coordinators to assist the filing of annual national reports, including a guide on national reporting, to facilitate the implementation of Article 9 and to further consideration of requests for assistance from affected countries. Action by the Meeting of States Parties on these items will help put in place mechanisms to assist States Parties in their implementation efforts.

The GGE's work in these areas follows the significant progress that Protocol V has made in the area of victim assistance. The adoption of the Plan of Action on Victim Assistance at the Second Meeting of States Parties was an important advancement as the Protocol contains no operative requirements in this area. As a result, the plan of action becomes a vital element of the Protocol and we encourage States to consider it closely when developing their national policies and practices on ERW.

The Plan of Action on Victim Assistance is an additional component of the international framework to addressing the needs of those injured by landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. Although the legal regimes dealing with these issues are separate, there are common procedures followed in the treatment and rehabilitation of those who have been injured by these weapons. In June 2009, the ICRC and the Norwegian Red Cross held a meeting in Oslo, Norway to discuss how best to put the commitments of these treaties into practice so as to improve the quality of life of victims. The participants in this event were professionals involved in providing medical, physical rehabilitation and socio-economic support to weapon victims, representatives of international organizations involved in standard setting in these fields and individual survivors.

The Oslo meeting resulted in the adoption of practical recommendations for States and organizations aimed at ensuring that survivors, their families and communities see substantial improvements in their lives in the years ahead. The recommendations include proposals for both affected countries and donor States and puts forth an approach to victim assistance that would be consistent with the Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War and with broader disability-related efforts. The participants agreed that improving the lives of survivors and others with disabilities will require States to give far greater priority to assistance for weapon victims and disabled persons. They also highlighted that victim assistance needs to be included in national development plans and will entail the provisions of adequate resources to improve health and social services and to ensure equal access to education and employment.

The recommendations of this conference are available at the back of the room. The ICRC offers them to States and other relevant bodies as a basis for future work.

Mr. President, the ICRC hopes that the expert work of Protocol V will continue and intensify in the coming year, for example in the area of recording and retention of information relevant to ERW. As we have said on previous occasions, one additional area of work is addressing the problems caused by existing ERW. As there are now several requests for assistance in dealing with existing ERW, Protocol V has an opportunity to establish itself as an important forum for addressing the dangers of the wide range of unexploded and abandoned ordnance not specifically covered in other instruments.

In closing, the ICRC believes that Protocol V has made important progress in 2009 on a number of issues which will help further the Protocol's implementation by national authorities. These steps are a good start towards the operationalization of the Protocol and in ensuring that the instrument achieves its goals of reducing the suffering caused by ERW and preventing similar situations from occurring in the future. Accomplishing these goals also requires that the Protocol's rules become universal norms. In this regard, we urge all States which are not yet parties to adhere to the Protocol as a matter of urgency.