



Press release

The Polisario Front starts to destroy its landmine stockpile

Geneva/Tifariti, 1 March 2006 – On 27 February 2006, the Polisario Front, in compliance with the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment, began the destruction of its stockpile of anti-personnel mines. The event took place in Tifariti, Western Sahara, during the celebrations marking the 30th anniversary of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (as recognized by the African Union and many States).

Polisario top officials attended the destruction ceremony, including Mohamed Abdelaziz, Polisario Front's Secretary General and President of the Republic, as well as the Minister of Defence, Mohamed Lamine Bouhali, in charge of the operation. During the ceremony, the Minister of Defence underlined that "this initiative reflects the choice of the Saharawi people for a peaceful settlement of the conflict". He added that the Polisario Front will complete the destruction of its remaining stockpile and called on Morocco to reciprocate.

The Geneva Call President Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey congratulated the Polisario Front for starting to destroy its stockpile only four months after signing the Deed of Commitment. "This demonstrates the Polisario attachment to international humanitarian law and, despite the current political deadlock, its will to respect and implement quickly its commitment" she said.

A number of foreign governments and international organisations witnessed the event; among them representatives from MINURSO, UNMAS, Landmine Monitor, the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines, Landmine Action UK and Geneva Call. In total, more than one thousand people attended. The President of the Association of Mine Survivors, a Polisario commander and the President of the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines also took the floor.

After the speeches, engineers from the Ministry of Defence proceeded to destroy 3'321 anti-personnel mines. Prior to the operation, Geneva Call and the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines had facilitated a mission with Norwegian People's Aid to assist the Polisario Front in the preparations and to discuss the relevant international mine action standards.

Geneva Call and the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines congratulate the Polisario Front for having successfully conducted this first stockpile destruction. Such an operation demonstrates the importance of engaging non-State actors in the mine ban and the role that they can play towards a mine free world. It is hoped that Morocco will take shortly concrete measures towards accession to the Ottawa Convention.

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