

The Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines celebrates the beginning of clearance tasks in El Orejón and urges the promotion of community development initiatives

Bogotá, 9th of July 2015.- After more than 15 years promoting the Landmine Action, the Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCBL) celebrates the beginning of the pilot agreed between the Colombian Government and the FARC guerrillas in the small village of El Orejón, in the municipality of Briceño (department of Antioquia). Despite this, the CCBL recalls the importance for the measure to be accompanied with a comprehensive effort that involves attention for victims, socio-economic reintegration, infrastructure improvements and guarantees of non-repetition.

The beginning of the de-mining marks a milestone in the Colombian society's aspiration for peace. For more than a decade, they have clamored to end the fear and anxiety generated in rural communities by these indiscriminate weapons.

"We see the demining in El Orejón as the beginning of a process and the continuation of an effort. It marks the beginning because if the de-mining is deep and it is consolidated, it marks the beginning of the end of landmines in Colombia. At the same time, it is a continuation because it is an effort which not only the CCBL, but the communities and other organizations, have been working to achieve: that peasants can return to their jobs, with the security that they are not going to be injured, maimed or killed, nor they are going to live under the fear of these weapons", said the director of the CCBL, Álvaro Jiménez Millán.

In this regard, de-mining is not only to remove the landmines, unexploded ordnances, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war, it is more than that.

"We don't have to see this exclusively as a subject of clearance the mines, but as an integral intervention, which means improving people's quality of life as well as the conditions of security, productivity, social welfare and employment, peaceful coexistence and reconciliation, which are required war-torn areas", said Jiménez Millán.

"This has begun as a pilot, but we aspire that this agreement will be deepened, developed and consolidated in order to achieve the end of landmines", he added.

El Orejón is the first of three points agreed upon between the Colombian Government and FARC guerrillas to start the de-mining pilot in the departments of Antioquia and Meta. However, the CCBL insists on that there are too many other places where it is necessary to develop clearance tasks. The victims that travelled to La Habana, where the peace process takes place, deliver to the negotiating delegations the location of 57 of these areas, one of which is El Orejón.

“We are thankful to the Colombian Government and FARC guerrillas because they have had the courage and the hopefulness to meet in Cuba to take this decision (...). We received it with surprise, but with lot of joy because the village is going to be free of landmines. At the same time, this place will become a candidate to become a peace laboratory”, expressed in an interview to CCBL Bernardo Peláez, a coffee farmer from El Orejón and one of the village leaders.

“Do you know what all of this is going to be useful for? For us to be able to caress the earth once more. We think that with the start of the de-mining process we are going to achieve a wonderful experience and will help us become a place of hope and prosperity. And this for us is priceless,” Peláez added.

According to the release issued by the Government of Colombia and FARC on May 29th, the first phase of approach on the ground was carried out by a assessment group that traveled to this village of population 70. The group was composed of Government delegates, members representing the FARC-EP, technicians from Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) with the accompaniment of Cuba and Norway, who facilitate the negotiation process as guarantor countries, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

After that, and as mentioned in the release, the phase known as Non-Technical Survey began. It identified four contaminated areas, which represent approximately 12,000 square meters. The stage known as Technical Survey is on going, which entails clearing the artifacts. The de-contamination may restore communities’ rights to free mobility, access to roads and paths, as well as the use of productive land.

The success of this process is guaranteed if the communities and the local and departmental authorities are involved during every stage. The CCBL will continue supporting and helping victims by orienting them on their rights and on prevention trough Landmine Risk Education.

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