GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON PROHIBITIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS WHICH MAY BE DEEMED TO BE EXCESSIVELY INJURIOUS OR TO HAVE INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS

CCW/GGE/I/WP.11
23 May 2002

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

First Session
Geneva, 21-24 May 2002

Discussion paper on the issue of the explosive remnants of war

(Russian Federation)

Armed conflicts leave behind them unexploded munitions, which we categorize as the unexploded remnants of war. In this category we include both aircraft-borne munitions and weapons used by land forces.

Munitions remaining behind after combat operations unquestionably impede the restoration of civilian life in the areas where these operations were conducted. Explosive remnants of war pose a threat to the lives and health of people.

The problem of explosive remnants of war has become particularly acute at the current time.

The papers submitted by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the International Committee of the Red Cross strike us as extremely important and have been prepared in a thorough manner, representing an initial version of the analysis and classification of explosive remnants of war and a basis for further analysis, refinement and additions.

For its part, the Russian Federation has first-hand experience, unparalleled by any other country in the world, of the explosive remnants of war and for more than 50 years has already been conducting practical measures to clear areas of such explosive devices.

We believe that, in discussing ways of tackling the problem of explosive remnants of war, proper account must be taken of a number of aspects, primary among which are the following:

- Organizational aspects - the procedure for the use of munitions of various types during combat operations; informing civilian populations about the dangers of unexploded ordnance; the stockpiling of munitions in areas of combat operations; the clearing of areas of remaining unused or unexploded ordnance, etc;
- Technical aspects - improving the design of munitions in such a way as to reduce the probability of their becoming unexploded ordnance or to ensure that they are rendered harmless;
- Economic aspect - the necessary financial and manufacturing resources required for the development and production of new munitions and the retrofitting of those already in existence to meet the requirements of possible future agreements and for the recycling of stockpiles of munitions which do not meet those requirements;
- International law aspect - the obligations of parties engaged in armed conflicts to clear areas of unexploded remnants of war and the responsibility of States to ensure compliance with such obligations, etc.

In our opinion, when discussing the issue of unexploded remnants of war, priority should be given to determining the types of munitions and explosive devices responsible for causing the most victims among civilian populations.

Attention should be given to such questions as whether the same threats are posed to civilian populations by unexploded aerial bombs and anti-vehicle mines, which remain active even after the end of hostilities until the expiry of their self-deactivation period; what threat is posed by home-made explosive devices assembled by terrorists but which, by good fortune, have not been used.

We should also consider whether the discussion should include mines whose use has already been restricted by Amended Protocol II.

The experience of implementing the relevant international treaties demonstrates the need to give priority consideration to the technical aspects of the problem under consideration, as these are the most intractable.

We believe that the utmost effort must be made to reduce the quantity of unexploded munitions (including duds) of all types which remain behind after the conduct of combat operations.

There are various ways in which this problem may be tackled.

The first of these is to ensure a sufficiently high degree of reliability of the weapon's primary function. This would make it possible to reduce the quantity of unexploded ordnance without the need to include any additional devices in their design.

The second approach to the problem is to ensure the self-destruction or self-deactivation of munitions in the event that they fail to perform their primary function.

Initial assessments have shown that fitting munitions with a structurally separate self-destruction device renders their design extremely complex and reduces the relative weight of explosives and, accordingly, the effectiveness of the weapon. In our experience, the retrofitting of any munitions with a view to bringing them in line with the new requirements costs the same, in terms of organizational and financial expenditure, as the production of new munitions. In addition, given the reduced combat effectiveness of a retrofitted weapon, the outlay in terms of effort and resources for the performance of the same combat task is accordingly increased, and this also necessitates additional expenditure. The cost of developing new designs fitted with self-destruction devices is almost double that of the production of munitions without such devices.

It must be asked whether this decision will be acceptable to all the participants in our consultations.

Another approach to the task of reducing the hazardous consequences of armed conflicts is the use of self-deactivation devices in munitions. The use of such devices renders the munitions virtually harmless (they can no longer be detonated by their igniter and only remain dangerous as filled but unfuzed shells).

The self-deactivation of munitions may be achieved in a number of different ways. This will also, without any question, involve considerable financial outlay and pose certain technical problems. The precise costs of fitting such devices will depend on the specific requirements and technological and financial capacities of the given State.

Another serious problem which must be examined in close detail is the continued use of stockpiles of munitions which do not meet the new requirements.

The simplest way of dealing with the problem would be to destroy the munitions. This would require the development of special technologies and construction of plants for the recycling of various types of munitions, taking due account of environmental considerations which, in their turn, will also entail financial expenditure and the necessary scientific and production resources.

The question is whether all States will be in a position to take this path without impairing their own national interests. Serious consideration must also be given to this question.

The various approaches to the problem of explosive remnants of war offer only preliminary solutions from the technical standpoint and must be carefully explored.

Given the complexity and the multidimensional nature of the problem of explosive remnants of war, it is essential that it be addressed in a stage-by-stage manner.
