Bangkok (Thailand) - Having fulfilled its obligations under the Ottawa Convention in destroying all stockpiled anti-personnel mines it possessed, Thailand is preparing to host the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention.

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The meeting will take place from September 15 to 19, 2003 at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) on Ratchadamnoen Nok Avenue in Bangkok.

The Ottawa Convention is officially titled the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction." Sometimes referred to as the Mine Ban Treaty, the Convention is the most comprehensive international instrument for ridding the world of the scourge of mines and deals with everything from mine use, production, and trade, to victim assistance, mine clearance, and stockpile destruction. In December 1997, a total of 122 governments signed the treaty in Ottawa, Canada, so the treatment is also known in short as the "Ottawa Convention." Of the 146 states that have joined the treaty up to the present, a total of 132 have ratified or acceded. Thailand was the first country in Southeast Asia to sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention. A number of Thai people living along the Thai-Cambodian border have been badly affected by landmines, as a result of years of armed conflicts in Cambodia. Extensive mine clearance has freed up vast tracts of land in the area.

As a state party to the Ottawa Convention, Thailand was required to destroy all stockpiled anti-personnel mines by 30 April 2003, four years after the entry into force of this Convention for the country. It was successful in completing the destruction of the final stockpile of anti-personnel mines on 24 April 2003, before the deadline of April 30. The Ottawa Convention also requires each state party to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its control not later than 10 years after the entry into force of this Convention for the state party. In this connection, Thailand will have until 30 April 2009 to fulfill this commitment. "Anti-personnel mine" means a mine designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person and that will injure or kill one or more persons.

The annual meetings of state parties to the Mine Ban Treaty take place alternately in Geneva, Switzerland, and in mine-affected countries in different regions in the world. The first meeting of state parties was held in Maputo, Mozambique, in May 1999, the second one in Geneva in September 2000, the third one in Managua, Nicaragua, in September 2001, and the fourth meeting in Geneva in September 2002.

About 600 delegates from governments, NGOs, international organizations, and UN agencies will participate in the Fifth Meeting of State Parties in Bangkok this September. The meeting is important, because it provides the opportunity for state parties to assess progress and report on plans for the implementation of the treaty. It also serves as a rallying point for civil society involvement and mobilization in the landmine issue. This year, stocktaking and civil society engagement are all the more important as preparation gets underway for the treaty Review Conference of 2004 and as the Mine Ban Treaty marks its fifth year since entry into force.

The meeting is the first of its kind to be held in Asia, which is an important region for the landmine issue. Mines are still a serious humanitarian problem here, yet more than half of the 49 countries in Asia and the Pacific have not banned the weapon and about a dozen are still using and producing them. Over 100 governments are eligible for full voting status at this meeting, and as many as 50 signatory and non-signatory countries will attend as observers. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Thai Campaign to Ban Landmines will actively join the meeting. The media are also invited to seek accreditation for the conference and the numerous public events and media briefings during the week. Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra, the patroness of the Thailand Mine Action Center, will graciously preside over the opening ceremony on September 15.

The Cabinet, during its meeting on 20 November 2001, approved the proposal by the Ministry of Defence for Thailand to host the Fifth Meeting of State Parties to the Ottawa Convention. Thailand has firm determination to join the international effort to rid the world of the global threat of landmines.

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