Peace burst out in a fiery blaze last month in Niger in the remote, sub-Saharan town of Agadez, in the centre of the country, east of Niamey. On 25 September, another symbolic Flame of Peace consumed a great stack of rifles and guns collected from disarmed and demobilized combatants. The ceremony commemorated another milestone in the nation’s peace process, a ritual end of conflicts and a dramatic beginning of a campaign to enlist the nation in a countrywide effort to end the scourge of illicit weapons.

A symbolic ceremonial destruction of weapons—first done in Timbuktu, Mali on 27 March 1996—has proven value. It serves to materialize the peace agreement and the crucial disarmament stage of post-conflict peace-building. As a confidence-building measure, it deepens the trust between the people and the government. It also demonstrates to the rest of the world a nation’s commitment to irrevocable peace. It stimulates the interest of donor countries. It is a plea for assistance in strengthening the security and safety of the civilian population, in collecting weapons, and in developing projects or investing.

**An infestation of guns**

Since independence in 1960, Niger has suffered nearly continuous economic and social turmoil and political conflict and instability, impoverishing the country of 10 million and discouraging foreign investment and assistance. Niger is among the world’s least developed countries. The Tuareg and Toubou peoples fought for independence. Local communities armed themselves in self-defence. The country’s vast territory is landlocked by Algeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Libya, Mali and Nigeria. Its porous borders have made it a convenient corridor for the flow of weapons to the conflict zones of its neighbours, most of which suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from internal tensions and a surplus of illicit weapons.

Starting in 1995, a series of internal peace accords began the slow process of national reconciliation. General elections took place in November 1999 and were considered free and fair by most observers. The new President, Mamadou Tandja, promised to include opposition parties in the management of state affairs, depoliticise the administration and resume international cooperation. **ECOWAS Moratorium**

In October 1998, President Bare of Niger, along with the other heads of State or Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), signed the Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa. Niger then established a National Commission for the Monitoring and Collection of Illicit Arms to implement the Moratorium and to act as a focal point for national and regional efforts being coordinated by the Moratorium’s follow-up mechanism, the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED). **WEAPONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Earlier this year, the Government requested the assistance of the Secretary-General in collecting unauthorized weapons. An interagency fact-finding mission, led by the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which included team members from the Department’s Regional Centre in Lomé, the Department of Political Affairs and the UN Development Programme, went to Niamey in August. As a result, recommendations were made for the United Nations to partner with the Government in the continued on page 4
O
d the Place des Nations in Geneva
is a two-storey high wooden chair.
One of its legs is missing the other half.
The end of the remaining half appears
shredded, as if torn off by a landmine.
This powerful sculpture stands vigil at
the entrance to the Palais des
Nations, a constant reminder to
the international community of
the daily innocent casualties,
many fatal, of the small yet dan-
gerous anti-personnel landmine
(APLMs).

According to the Landmine
Monitor Report 2000: Toward a
Mine-Free World, published in
September 2000 by the
International Campaign to Ban
Landmines (ICBL), there is
some good news. The number of
casualties from landmine blasts
is diminishing. In fact, there are
fewer mine victims in key
affected countries, including
Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herze-
govina, Cambodia and
Mozambique.

The number of governments joining
and fully implementing the treaty has
grown. Currently, 107 States have rati-
fied the Convention. Destruction of

stockpiled antipersonnel mines has
increased. More than 22 million have
been destroyed by over 50 nations,
including some 10 million since March
1999.

More land has been demined. In 1999
seven of the largest humanitarian
mine/unexploded ordnance (UXO)
clearance programmes cleared a com-
bined total of more than 168 million
square metres of land.

The Mine Ban Convention, which
prohibits the use, stockpiling, produc-
tion and transfer of APLMs, and pro-
vides for their complete destruction,
held its second annual meeting since it
entered into force on 1 March 1999,
from 11 to 15 September 2000, in
Geneva, under the motto, Every Minute
Counts. The meeting adopted a report
containing a declaration and the
President's programme of action. The
declaration expressed deep concern that
APLMs continue to kill, maim and
threaten the lives of countless innocent
people each day.

In the declaration, the States parties
recognized that achieving "the promise
of the Convention rested in continuing
to be tireless in efforts to end the use of
anti-personnel mines, to eradi-
cate stockpiles, to cease devel-
opment, production and trans-
fers of these weapons, to clear
mined areas in order to free
land from its deadly bondage,
to assist victims to reclaim
their lives and to prevent new
victims."

In noting the progress
made in implementing the
Convention, the Parties wel-
comed that over 20 States had
completely destroyed all their
stockpiles of landmines.
Another 23 are in the process
of complete destruction. The
sum of $US 250 million had
been allocated by donors over
the past year to address the
global landmine problem.

The Action Programme put
forward by the President,
Ambassador Steffen Kongstad
(Norway), contained a list of
events aimed at contributing to increas-
ing the momentum towards greater
adherence to and complete implementa-
tion of the Convention.

a) In cooperation with the
Organization of American States and the
Lima Regional Centre of the
Department for Disarmament Affairs,
Argentina and Canada are hosting a
seminar on stockpile destruction in
At the Summit

The largest ever gathering of world leaders from 6 to 8 September at the United Nations addressed the smallest of weapons, landmines. Only three topics on disarmament were addressed; the others were nuclear disarmament and small arms. In their Millennium Declaration, the more than 150 heads of State and Government launched a unanimous call for all States to consider acceding to the Mine Ban Convention as well as the amended mines protocol to the Convention on conventional weapons. Several States, in fact, seized the occasion of the unique meeting to respond to that call by presenting their legal instruments of adherence to these conventions.

For further information, see website <http://www.un.org/Dept/dda/DDAHome.htm>

continued from page 2

Buenos Aires on 6 and 7 November 2000.

b) Canada and Hungary are hosting a seminar in early 2001 on the unique challenges associated with the destruction of a specific type of landmine (type PFM).

c) In cooperation with the Organization of African Unity, and with the assistance of the Lomé Regional Centre, Canada and France will host a conference on the universalization and implementation of the Convention in Bamako, Mali on 15 and 16 February 2001.

The States parties also took decisions on decreasing the number of meetings during the year, combining mine clearance and mine action in the same standing committee, expanding the reporting procedure under article 7 of the Convention, and establishing a coordinating committee of the co-chairs of the various standing committees.

Aiming to attract attention to the regions of the world where landmine eradication will make a difference, the next annual meeting will take place in Managua, Nicaragua from 18 to 21 September 2001. The first annual meeting in May 1999 had been held in Maputo, Mozambique.

In his message at the opening of the meeting, the Secretary-General seized the occasion to stress once again the substantial contributions that civil society, especially NGOs, have made to creating a culture that will not tolerate more victims of APLMs.

“The spirit of partnership between governments and non-State actors”, he declared, “forged during the negotiation of the Treaty has further developed to the benefit of our common endeavour.”

MILLENIUM DECLARATION

In the great public hall of the General Assembly, during the three days of the Millennium Summit in New York, 6-8 September, the more than 150 heads of State or Government spoke soberly of the life and death challenges of the next millennium—war and conflict, disarmament, poverty alleviation, debt, and the environment.

Commenting on disarmament, the speakers generally supported the role of the United Nations in the field of nuclear disarmament, small arms and landmines. One specific proposal was made. President Putin of the Russian Federation called for the convening of a conference in spring 2001 in Moscow to address the prevention of the militarization of outer space.

Nuclear disarmament

Taking into account the Secretary-General’s proposal to the Millennium Assembly that it consider convening an international conference to identify ways to reduce nuclear dangers, the high-level participants resolved in the consensus Millennium Declaration to "strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and to keep all options open for achieving this aim, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers."

While some non-nuclear-weapon States supported the convening of such a conference in their statements, others stressed that the call for an international conference might be untimely in that nuclear disarmament commitments had now been made by the NPT Parties in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference in May this year.

They believed that those commitments should be the benchmarks by which to measure progress in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Some of the nuclear-weapon States considered the convening of a special session of the General Assembly, with an agenda that would balance nuclear and conventional disarmament, to be a more appropriate option for global consideration of the issue.

Illicit small arms

Attesting to the growing interest in ways to tackle the issue of the excessive proliferation of illicit small arms, the heads of State and Government resolved "to take concerted action to end illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons, especially by making arms transfers more transparent and supporting regional disarmament measures.” They highlighted the importance of action that will take account of the recommendations of the forthcoming 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

Security Council Summit

Also on the subject of small arms, the declaration adopted by a special summit meeting of the Security Council on 7 September stressed the critical importance of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and emphasized that such programmes should normally be integrated into the mandates of peacekeeping operations. It also "called for effective international action to prevent the illegal flow of small arms into areas of conflict.”
development of a pilot weapons collection project, initially for the region of N’Guigmi and later to expand to other regions. In exchange for weapons handed in, the community—similar to the successful arrangements carried out in Gramsh, Albania—will benefit from development projects chosen by the communities themselves. In order for such a project to be successful, the mission strongly recommended that civil society, especially women and youth, be involved closely in decision-making and in the political process of the country. It also suggested an organized public sensitization campaign to promote participation in and support for the turning in of weapons and the development of projects.

The Group of Interested States in Practical Disarmament Measures, an informal open-ended caucus of donor countries, backed the mission financially and its support is being encouraged for the implementation of the project. States are also being urged to support the wider efforts being made without which peace cannot be consolidated - addressing the dire poverty of the country, improving civilian participation in governance and reforming the security structures, such as the army, police and border controls.

Addressing leaders, policy and opinion-makers at the Flame of Peace ceremony, which will forever form part of the modern history of Niger, Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, struck the theme of the Millennium Summit, "You are burning the tools of violence," he said, "now you have to use the tools of peace, the people."