



United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action

2023 Meeting of the HCP of the CCW

[Statement under Agenda Item 7 – General exchange of views]

Geneva, 15-17 November 2023

Delivered by UNMAS

Mr. Chairperson¹,

I deliver the following statement on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action² comprising the 12 United Nations entities involved in mine action.

The United Nations wishes to congratulate you on your appointment as Chairperson of this year's Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). We are convinced that under your able leadership, the CCW will continue to advance mine action, international humanitarian law, and broader disarmament efforts.

Excellencies,

¹ H. E. Mr. Federico Villegas, Permanent Representative of the Argentine Republic to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Chairperson of the 2023 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

² The United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action consists of twelve United Nations Departments and Offices of the Secretariat, specialized agencies, funds and programmes: the United Nations Mine Action Service of the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the World Bank are observers.



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The CCW Amended Protocol II on mines, booby-traps and other devices and Protocol V on explosive remnants of war, constitute important international legal instruments for our work.

As the Secretary-General noted in his recent report on assistance in mine action, the threat posed by improvised explosive devices has progressively expanded and accounted for almost half of the 9,198 casualties³ recorded by UN programmes in 2022. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas is causing immense suffering among civilians and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure. Ongoing and renewed hostilities in Gaza, Mali, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Ukraine are exposing more civilians to the threats from landmines, explosive remnants of war including cluster munitions, and improvised explosive devices. Extreme weather events are compounding explosive ordnance threats which also cause all sorts of damage to people and the environment: soil degradation, release of hazardous chemicals, pressure on natural resources, risk from forest fires, and to animals. The full extent of these challenges must be addressed.

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates,

I would like to draw your attention to four issues to which we attach great importance.

The High Contracting Parties have a collective responsibility to help States that are struggling with contamination. Looking at funding patterns, we would like to highlight severe gaps and imbalance in the way mine action funding is allocated, with certain countries seemingly being forgotten. We call for more equity in the way mine action budgets and assistance are allocated and

³ Data is drawn from the monitoring and evaluation mechanism of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023, which for 2022 reflects input from 27 of the 28 countries and territories with active United Nations mine action operations. Data compiled through this mechanism relies on both United Nations and national sources. For more details, see the dashboard at www.mineaction.org/en/interactive-dashboard-of-un-mine-action-strategy.



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encourage all Parties to contribute to the best of their abilities. The number of mine action donors is simply too small compared to the challenges we all face to protect civilians from explosive ordnance. We have a vibrant sector with many qualified organizations suffering from the funding shortage.

Victim Assistance remains an underfunded pillar of mine action. The best practice captured in the new IMAS 13.10 is to invest in information management, referrals and multisectoral coordination. Furthermore, we recommend establishing a National Coordination Committee in every affected country to steer a multisectoral approach to victim assistance. Health care and explosive ordnance victims are in great danger: in today's conflicts, hospitals and medical facilities are too often targeted or damaged due to the conduct of hostilities and our advocacy work on victim assistance builds on the premise that these medical facilities are 'functioning' so that survivors can access and receive services⁴. But in too many conflicts, this critical civilian infrastructure has been destroyed and is understaffed and underequipped. This needs to be urgently addressed.

On the environment, we wish to provide an example from Iraq on leading an inclusive, gender-responsive and environmental approach in the implementation of the Convention. In the Shatt Al-Arab, outside of Basra City, the watercourses have increased salinity due to water extraction and there is a loss of soil through erosion. Due to explosive ordnance contamination, the areas also cannot be planted with crops, which would help to stabilize the soil. In collaboration with one of the UNMAS Iraq implementing partners, mixed teams of women and men were mobilized to work in the affected areas to clear explosive ordnance. Clearance would allow crops

⁴ [The Security Council Resolution 2286](#) strongly condemns acts of violence, attacks and threats against the wounded and sick, medical personnel and humanitarian personnel exclusively engaged in medical duties, their means of transport and equipment, as well as hospitals and other medical facilities, and deplores the long-term consequences of such attacks for the civilian population and the health-care systems of the countries concerned.



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to be planted and the soil to stabilize. This is a first step in the rehabilitation of this area of wetlands as this, in turn, would reduce the loss of soil into the watercourses. Several countries are developing national standards on environmental management in mine action, for instance Cambodia with UNDP support. “We will update the International mine action standard on environmental management in mine action in 2024 to reflect the best practices learnt in past years.”

The use of landmines, cluster munitions and heavy explosive weapons in populated areas is causing devastating harm to civilians and presenting a severe challenge to the longstanding norm against the use of inhumane and indiscriminate weapons in armed conflict. We reiterate the Secretary-General’s call made in his policy brief on *A New Agenda for Peace* to reduce the human cost of weapons, including by centering our peace and security considerations on the imperative to save human lives. We invite the High Contracting Parties to recommit to the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and advance the faithful implementation and universalization of this Convention and its annexed Protocols. The UN is preparing an implementation guide for the CCW and its protocols to assist States in this. We also encourage High Contracting Parties to strengthen their sharing of information on how they are implementing the Convention and protocols through their yearly compliance and national annual reports.

The escalation of armed conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sudan and Ukraine, has not only resulted in thousands of civilian casualties; it has set us back decades in terms of mine action. Past achievements and millions in funding spent on clearance have been buried under the rubble of residential buildings, critical infrastructure, and leveled cities. A prompt return to peace and strict adherence to international humanitarian law is urgently needed to effectively protect men, women, boys and girls from explosive weapons and ordnance.

Thank you.

END.