

Mine Action Support Group Meeting, October 2015

Update by Australia

We would like at the outset to thank the chair Ambassador Okamura for his work over the past two years and look forward to working with the incoming chair, Italy, from next year.

The Australian Government remains committed to the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. We value our current role as the co-coordinator on victim assistance under the Convention on Cluster Munitions. We encourage states to integrate victim assistance into broader national policies so as to guarantee reliable, ongoing support for victims.

There remains much work to be done in mine action. There are new challenges to be met. And there remain old munitions which are still causing significant harm to civilians. Recent Australian Government funded research in Solomon Islands shows the extent of the problem there and the ongoing humanitarian impact.

We encourage our partners present at this meeting to continue to work actively to promote the universalisation and implementation of these Conventions.

A big challenge that we all face is the reduction in funds available for this work. Between 2010 and 2014 the Australian Government spent over \$125 million on mine action – approximately \$30 million per financial year. This financial year we have approximately \$4 million to spend on mine action. This includes both global and bilateral programs – with Australia continuing to fund demining activities in Cambodia and Palau.

We are also obliged to reduce by twenty percent the number of individual projects we fund as a tool to focus our efforts and to reduce transaction costs. We are also to concentrate our efforts in our region. Consequently, we are now having to seriously consider how make the most effective use our funds. We will continue to work with partners such as the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and International Campaign to Ban Land Mines and Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC). But our ability to fund emergencies and mine action outside of our region is much more limited.

The Australian Defence Force's Operation Render Safe will continue to undertake clearance operations in the south west Pacific. The last operation was conducted in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, in October and November 2014 and involved explosive ordnance disposal teams from Australia, US, UK, New Zealand, Canada and Solomon Islands. We expect to conduct another operation in the Pacific next year.

Australia was also pleased to host the inaugural *International Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Leaders' Forum* at Parliament House in Canberra on 2-4 September 2015.

The Australia Government values the work of the implementation support units to the conventions and makes regular contributions to them. We note that at the First Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions held recently in Dubrovnik, agreement was reached on funding of the implementation support unit. We are hopeful that an agreement will be reached during the Meeting of States Parties to be held in Geneva later in the year on the funding of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention implementation support unit. These implementation support units conduct important work and we call on states to fund them adequately.