

Remarks by

**Under Secretary of Arms Control and International Security Rose
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and UN Advisers**

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Thank you for the kind introduction; I am honored to be here. Thanks to the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and to the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for organizing this meeting. Most importantly, thank you all for the important work that you do. Your persistent and noble efforts save lives every day.

We are all here, because we know that the protection of civilians is an essential precondition for enduring peace and prosperity. The threat from landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) endangers farmers plowing their fields, children walking to school, and entrepreneurs trying to build their communities.

For landmine and ERW impacted communities, the conflict they endured has not ended; the wounds of war they received have not healed. Together, we can change that. At the core of our efforts is a basic principle: everyone should have the opportunity to walk the earth in safety. Together, we can make this basic principle into reality.

We have already made tremendous progress towards this goal over the past few decades, but our work remains unfinished.

Today, I am issuing a call to all states to join the United States as we enhance and expand our efforts to protect civilians from landmines and unexploded ordnance. These efforts are underpinned by three components.

First, even in peacetime, all states need to minimize the likelihood that weapons will become a post-conflict threat. That means instituting best practices in the management of munition stockpiles. Dangerous weapons depots often pose a tremendous risk to civilians in the surrounding area. States should continuously assess and re-assess their inventories, so that they can safely remove and dispose of aging and obsolete munitions. States must also take a hard look at their defense requirements to make certain that the arms and ammunition in their stockpile are necessary and appropriate.

Removing and disposing of dangerous munitions is not just a humanitarian issue. From a national security perspective, protecting stockpiles and weapons depots is just common sense. The United States stands ready to assist countries in safely disposing of aging or obsolete weapons, and in ensuring remaining stockpiles are properly secured and managed.

Second, during the course of armed conflict, parties to the conflict need to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. They must also take steps to protect civilians from the effects of armed conflict. This includes ensuring that their armed forces do not make the civilian populations, individual civilians, and civilian objects, the targets of attacks. Further, every feasible measure to limit collateral damage must be employed. Taken together, these actions could greatly reduce the need for post-conflict mine action.

Third, the global community must redouble our efforts to clear explosive remnants of war in post-conflict environments, from Angola to Laos to Colombia. In the wake of a ceasefire, our sense of collective urgency tends to fade, but it is actions like demining that really lay the groundwork for peace and security.

According to the Landmine Monitor, 2014 is the second year in a row in which financial support from international donors has decreased. We must reverse this trend immediately. The United States pledges to do its part and help others.

In Angola, one of the most mined countries in the world, I heard from government and civil society representatives about the drastic reduction in financial support for demining. This funding drop has coincided with falling commodity prices, severely impacting the government's ability to make up for the shortfall.

At current funding rates, Angola could now remain impacted by mines and unexploded ordnance well past 2040. By reinvigorating support for Angolan demining, we may move the deadline closer by 10, even 15 years. Think of how many lives and limbs that would save.

Laos is in a similar situation, which is why last month my boss, Secretary Kerry, announced we would increase our support from \$9 million two years ago to over \$19 million in the year ahead.

Ladies and Gentleman, I have no doubt that consistent, steady work on these three fronts will improve civilian protections. Obstacles, challenges and delays, of course, remain ahead. Even so, working together, we are capable of eliminating the threats posed by explosive remnants of war.

My optimism is drawn from our many past achievements. Just fifteen years ago, explosive remnants of war killed or injured nearly 10,000 men, women, and children every year. Thanks to the efforts of the international community - and the people in this room - that figure has now dropped by more than 60 percent.

To date, 29 states have declared themselves free from the humanitarian impact of mines. After years of concerted international effort, Mozambique became the newest addition to that list in September 2015. Once one of the world's most landmine-afflicted countries, each and every known minefield in Mozambique has now been cleared.

I am proud that the United States plays a leadership role in these efforts around the world. On February 4, President Obama announced that the United States and Norway will lead a Global Demining Initiative for Colombia, and highlighted his request to Congress for \$21 million dollars in the next fiscal year for this initiative.

We hope this initiative can open up new channels of cooperation between our nations. This was the case with the United States and Vietnam following reestablishment of diplomatic ties 20 years ago. Mine action was one of the first areas where we were able to work together.

Since 1993, the United States has invested over \$2.5 billion in conventional weapons destruction, including the removal of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Together with other countries, international assistance on mine action in 2014 totaled \$417 million.

These figures represent not just money spent, but also genuine progress towards protecting civilians. I have been fortunate enough to see firsthand how mine action has a real impact on people's lives.

In Angola, schools and homes are being built on former minefields, and thousands of children in the Moxico province can now look forward to going to school safely.

In Vietnam's Quang Tri province, I met with farmers who can support their families and build their communities, after their lands were cleared of unexploded ordnance.

In Lebanon, I traveled to Hammana to visit the Lebanese Mine Action Center's mine detection dog facilities. This Center's work provides a sustainable capacity that will keep thousands of civilians safe for years to come.

These are just a few examples, and I know all of you have many more stories about the real, tangible impact mine action funding has on the lives of innocent civilians around the world.

We have come a long way, but there is so much to do.

Although we have been able to reduce the recorded casualty rate to 3,678 in 2014, that number is still too high. We can do better. Although funding for mine action in 2014 was – as I mentioned – over \$400 million, we have seen a decrease in overall contributions. We can do better.

Protecting civilians from explosive remnants of war is and will remain a foreign policy priority for the United States, for President Obama and for Secretary Kerry. We know that is the right thing to do, but we also know it is the smart thing to do. Mine action enables lasting peace. That is why we are supporting these efforts in word and in deed.

Today, I call on all states to join us. Recommit to humanitarian mine action. Increase monetary and technical contributions to these efforts.

Everyone in this room knows that our job is not finished until every single person can walk the earth in safety. Let's make sure our colleagues and communities back home know that, too.

I wish you all the best in your discussions and look forward to hearing about the results of this meeting. Thank you for your attention and again, thank you for the work that you do.