

Opening statement delivered by  
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Advisors*

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

Welcome to the 19th International Meeting of Mine Action National Programme Directors and UN Advisors. Thank you from my side as well to the UN Geneva for hosting us here. This meeting is the most significant gathering of the year for the mine action community. It provides a unique opportunity to assess progress and challenges in our sector.

Last year we focussed our deliberations on the **evolution** of mine action. We agreed that it is key for the sector to strike the right balance and articulate properly between its traditional mandate – to achieve completion and assist the victims – and engaging in new and emerging areas of work – Ammunitions Safety Management, Improvised Explosive Devices, even Small Arms and Light Weapons.

For this year's meeting, let me emphasize particularly the challenge of **operating in the context of protracted violent crises**. More than ever before, mine action actors are being called upon to operate in areas close to conflict zones, or in situations immediately following the cessation of hostilities. This evolving working environment in certain areas of the world brings about a new set of challenges that we have to be ready to face.

This evolution makes it particularly fitting for this year's meeting to be framed around the **World Humanitarian Summit**, which will take place next May in Istanbul. Concrete actions and commitments will be agreed upon there to prepare for and respond better to humanitarian crises. The Summit will also explore innovative approaches and good practices that can help save lives – a shared goal with our very meeting this week.

Five core issues will be discussed in Istanbul: *Partnerships, Safety, Resilience, Dignity and Funding*. Let me focus briefly on the first of them: partnerships.

The evolution of our working context in certain areas of the world – as we see it – is characterized by **multiple risks, multiple tasks and multiple actors, and – as a consequence – a significantly increased need to join forces**. Think of this: in addition to traditional minefields, a new, urban contamination is emerging, a contamination which is often covered under rubble. Poorly managed ammunition stockpiles and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons have to be addressed as well, often simultaneously. Non-state armed groups increasingly resort to use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Operating in these multi-risk, multi-task contexts is a humanitarian imperative. However, it creates considerable challenges for mine action organizations, whose very mandate requires them to eliminate specific instruments of war. How to access contaminated land? How to ensure the safety and security of staff? How to uphold the humanitarian principles that characterize their modus operandi? These challenges – access, safety and security, upholding humanitarian principles – are common to all humanitarian actors operating in such situations. We believe they demand greater cooperation between them – for example through joint risk analyses and shared mitigation measures.

The lack of clear-cut interlocutors to liaise with in these contexts represents another significant challenge. How to plan strategically, coordinate operations, and manage information efficiently? In our experience, the existence of a legitimate international framework can help in that regard. Such framework is typically provided through the United Nations or a regional body such as the OSCE. It can help enhance the legitimacy and feasibility of operations and makes them more sustainable.

Challenges, yes, but – let me stress it – opportunities as well: let us not forget the role mine action can play in building confidence among parties to a conflict and even providing peace dividends to an on-going peace process. Colombia is a case in point in that regard. The GICHD is currently reviewing situations where mine action promoted peace-building and will release its findings in few months.

Dear colleagues. I believe that this week's meeting is a unique opportunity to place mine action *firmly* on the agenda of the World Humanitarian Summit. In view of the evolution of our working contexts in certain areas of the world, mine action will need to draw closer to the 'humanitarian family'. And to the peace-building community as well! To explore what that means concretely in the coming days is very timely, indeed.

Thank you.