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United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action

15th Conference of High Contracting Parties to Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War

(9 December 2021)

[Statement under agenda item 8 - General exchange of views]

Delivered by Mr. Bruno Donat, Chief, Geneva Office, UNMAS

Mr. President¹,

This statement is delivered on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (IACG-MA)². The United Nations commends you for your excellent leadership and efforts as President of the 15th Conference of High Contracting Parties to Protocol V. Allow me to take this opportunity also to transmit our gratitude to your team, especially those of our sister United Nations entity, Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA).

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) continue to cause indiscriminate harm long after hostilities have ceased. Among the terrible consequences of ERW incidents are permanently impaired girls, boys, women, and men. Children, in particular, can easily be attracted by ERW laying on the ground. For many of them, life ends with what they saw as a new toy or a valuable object. On average, two in three ERW casualties are children. In addition to this direct and immediate human suffering, ERW contamination, especially in urban areas, hinders stabilization, infrastructure recovery and reconstruction efforts, and thereby exacerbates the already horrible consequences of conflict even further.

¹ Mr. Angus September, Counsellor for Disarmament Affairs at the South African Permanent Mission in Geneva, President-designate of the 15th Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Protocol V.

² The United Nations Departments and Offices of the Secretariat, specialized agencies, funds and programmes are: 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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Mr. President,

As outlined in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy (2019-2023), the United Nations' vision is "a world free of the threat of mines and ERW".

We are far from reaching this objective. On the contrary, we are witnessing growing contamination rates and increased numbers of casualties caused by explosive ordnance. In 2020, as reported in the 23rd annual edition of the *Landmine Monitor*³, 28% of such casualties were due to ERW, including cluster munition remnants. To give an example of how fast a conflict can lead to ERW contamination, in Gaza the estimated failure rate of explosive items dropped during the escalation of hostilities in May 2021 was 10%. This means that the conflict has left a dangerous explosive legacy and a high number of ERW on the ground.

Excellencies,

Recalling Art. 8 of Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the United Nations urges High Contracting Parties to scale up ERW clearance and to provide earmarked funding to ERW risk education and victim assistance activities. Such activities must be tailored to the human rights and the specific needs of girls, boys, women, men, and persons with disabilities, in every context. An ongoing and systematic collection and use of accurate data, disaggregated by age, sex, and disability, is also necessary for effective programming.

Mr. President, please allow me to present just two examples of recent United Nations risk education activities:

In Ukraine, just this year, in 2021, UNICEF rolled out a new digital campaign on how to adopt safe behavior in the presence of explosive ordnance. This campaign has reached some 400,000 children living in both sides of the contact line.

³ International Campaign to Ban Landmines, *Landmine Monitor 2021*, p. 44.



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In Gaza, during and after the hostilities in May 2021, UNMAS broadcasted EORE messages on four local radio stations for two weeks, with an estimated reach of 1.4 million people. Messages on EORE were also disseminated through social media among family centers and community-based organizations. Audio and text messages were posted in over 300 pages and groups.

Excellencies,

Risk education is necessary where contamination is still present. The United Nations continues to clear land and render it safe. In 2020, 71.000 ERW were destroyed and rendered safe by UNMAS.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo completed 570 Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) tasks and destroyed over 900 ERW, allowing for agricultural income generation activities to be carried out.

Since the beginning of 2021, UNMAS has released over 7.000 km² of land and roads in South Sudan and destroyed over 20.000 ERW by completing some 600 EOD tasks.

Mr. President,

These examples show how the United Nations is committed to doing its utmost to assist States Parties to meet their legal obligations while also advocating for the universalization of Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Thank you.

END