Statement delivered by the GICHD

Seventh Annual Conference of the CCW Amended Protocol II

IEDS

11 November 2015

Thank you Mr Coordinator.

The widespread use of IEDs now threatens and impacts upon civil populations more than ever before. IEDs have become a weapon of choice for actors across all regions of the world. Thereby, easy access to Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and unattended ammunition play a significant catalyzing role. The increase in the number of civilian casualties has turned the IEDs threat into a major humanitarian challenge. I would like to raise a few points on the role of mine action in relation to IEDs.

Mine action organizations have traditionally been engaged only to a limited extent in mitigating the threat posed by IEDs; this is especially valid for urban settings, where we observe today a sharp increase in use. While there have been some exceptions in the past, these operations have typically been undertaken by military or police personnel.

Although addressing IEDs is not part of traditional mine action, this is not to say that mine action actors have no role to play in that. Indeed they have been playing a role in activities such as:

- Limiting access to material used to produce IEDs. I will come back to this point.
- Sharing information on the extent of the humanitarian challenge following conflicts
- Providing risk education to civilians

What is new today is that, in the context of current conflicts, mine action actors are increasingly being called upon to address IEDs situations in areas in or close to conflict zone or in situations immediately following the cessation of hostilities.

Should mine action organisations respond to these calls? In our opinion, the extent to which they should has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the following considerations.

- Firstly, there should be a clear and well defined humanitarian need for mine action actors to get involved.
- Secondly, mine action actors should limit their potential interventions to explosive devices representing a legacy of war. It is a matter of both upholding the humanitarian principles guiding the work of mine action organisations and of ensuring the safety and security of their personnel. Admittedly, distinguishing between an active and a legacy IED in the field is a challenging task. The utmost care is required.
Thirdly, personnel involved in mitigating the risks posed by IEDs should be properly qualified, and there should be shared clarity on the qualifications required. In that regard, let me emphasise that, being qualified as a mine-action operator does not make one automatically qualified as an expert in the disposal of IEDs.

Coming back to the preventive role of mine action: mine action does, indeed, reduce the availability of raw material used for the production of IEDs. Let me elaborate a bit further on this point.

In conflict and post-conflict situations, unattended explosive devices can become easily accessible through one or multiple sources. Such sources might be:

- Improperly managed military ammunition stores
- Abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO) in battlefield scenarios
- Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) from battlefields or military firing ranges
- Dumped ammunition retrieved from sea and from sunken ships and barges

Mines and ERW clearance programmes address the latter three sources. As to the first, we believe that an increased focus on proper ammunition management and storage is urgently called for. Think for example of Libya, where poorly stored anti-vehicle mines represent a significant source for IEDs.

Let me conclude with the following point. The term “IEDs” refers to the way an explosive device is produced, but does not provide clarity on the type of device. We should be careful not to create the impression that IEDs refer to a new category of weapons: For instance, an IED that functions as a mine should be categorized as a mine, that is an explosive device to which international treaties such as AP II are applicable.