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Opening remarks by Ambassador Tobias Privitelli
GICHD Director

Intersessional Meeting of the APMBC, Geneva, 17 June 2025

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues,

It is an honour to address you at the opening of this Intersessional meeting of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty. I sincerely thank you for being here and for demonstrating your commitment, especially at a time of unprecedented political and financial pressure on this Convention.

Let me also thank Ambassador Ichikawa for her remarkable stewardship of our work so far, and Director Juan-Carlos Ruan and the ISU for their dedicated support to full APMBC implementation.

Since its adoption, the APMBC has had a very tangible impact: 164 States Parties have destroyed more than 53 million stocked mines; thirty States Parties have completed clearance; countless lives have been saved, survivors supported, communities restored. This work has been central to promoting and solidifying the global norm against the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of anti-personnel mines.

Yet, today, the progress achieved through decades of collective effort is at risk. Confirmed or announced withdrawals from the Convention, increasing contamination and declining financial support by several donors threaten the continuation of this progress.

It is shocking to hear that the number of victims from landmines and other explosive ordnance is again on the rise. We are witnessing increasing mine contamination in countries such as Ukraine and Syria. In Syria, UNMAS counted 2753 explosive-ordnance related accidents between December 2024 and April 2025 in which 1082 people lost their lives.

The human cost of using landmines remains too high. Landmines continue to kill and maim civilians - nearly half of whom are children and women. They hinder post-conflict recovery and sustainable development. Current debates on withdrawing from the Convention, therefore, set a dangerous precedent, weakening the broader rules-based system of international humanitarian law. A system developed over decades to protect civilians during and after armed conflict. Against this concerning backdrop, funding cuts directly affect the sector's ability to address growing needs.

Madam President, excellencies, colleagues,

As we confront the challenges ahead, we must strengthen our efforts to implement the APMBC, exploring ways to be more efficient and effective in a context of growing needs and competing priorities both domestically and on the international agenda.

The Siem Reap-Angkor Action Plan provides a solid foundation for these efforts. Allow me to highlight a few points in this regard.

- First, the Siem Reap Action Plan further emphasizes the role of mine action as part of global efforts to protect civilians, and towards peace and development. It commits States Parties to implement APMBC provisions as part of national development strategies – linking them to poverty reduction, human rights and peacebuilding.
- Second, the Plan calls for strengthened localization efforts to support sustainable interventions, including post completion, and allow affected countries to develop their own mine action sector.
- Third, the Action Plan maintains that inclusion is critical to effective and sustainable outcomes. This entails considering age, disability, and the distinct experiences of women, men, girls and boys in all aspects of APMBC implementation.
- Finally, the Action Plan reaffirms that all Convention obligations matter equally.. It underscores the central role of victim assistance and mine risk education, especially in contexts where clearance is delayed or residual contamination remains.

All these points are closely aligned with the very essence of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining. Since its inception, the Centre has supported national authorities in establishing the systems, knowledge, and skills required to address contamination from landmines and other explosive ordnance.

Most recently, we have provided strategic planning support to Yemen, Libya, Angola, Ukraine, and Sri Lanka. These efforts contribute directly to the sustainable, inclusive, and locally driven approaches the Siem Reap Action Plan calls for.

We will share further details of our work in the course of this week's meetings.

Finally, I would like to commend the work of all mine action authorities and organizations present here and the deminers on the ground. In a time in which we see some individuals, governments and organizations are opting for violence, aggression and neglect of international law, others are committed to protect civilians and contribute to peace. In other words, those who engage in humanitarian demining, have made the right choice.

The APMBC has saved lives, returned land to productive use, and helped communities rebuild. Its relevance remains undiminished. Let us keep this in mind as we begin our deliberations.

I wish you all a productive and engaging week.