

-----CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY-----

**Statement by Ms Greta Zeender
Head of External Relations, Policy and Cooperation Programmes, GICHD**

“Clearing mined areas and mine risk education and reduction”

Fifth Review Conference of the APMBC

Siem Reap, Cambodia, 25-29 November 2024

Thank you, Mr. President,

Dear excellencies, colleagues and friends,

In today’s volatile and evolving conflict landscape, the mine action sector faces unprecedented challenges that require us to reassess and adapt our approaches and strategies. For several years, the global conflict landscape has been increasingly marked by complex and protracted conflicts involving both state and non-state actors. As reported by the Oslo Peace Research Institute, state-based conflicts have increased in the past decade, with a record number of 59 armed conflicts in 34 countries registered in 2023 alone. Today, half of the mine-affected states worldwide are embroiled in active conflicts, often in densely populated areas where civilians account for up to 90% of casualties from explosive weapons, including increasing numbers of women and children.

Faced with these complex realities, we need to renew our commitment and join forces in shaping responsive, innovative, and adaptable mine action responses.

Three specific challenges that directly impact our work:

1. **Non-State Actor involvement:** The increasing role of non-state armed groups complicates mine action efforts, often creating issues of safety and access. These actors frequently deploy improvised explosive devices (IEDs) also in urban contexts, which results in complex contamination scenarios that challenge both clearance and risk education efforts. The rise in victim-activated IEDs, which accounted for nearly a third of all casualties, underscores the urgent need for responsive measures.
2. **Challenges to established norms:** Instances of landmine use by States not party to the APMBC; the growing use of improvised mines by non-state armed groups; and the occasional

resurfacing of the perspective that anti-personnel mines are a legitimate means of warfare with military value indicate that a challenge to the fundamental norm against the use of landmines may be at play.

3. **Funding and Stakeholder Engagement:** Traditional funding mechanisms and donor priorities often fail to keep pace with the evolving demands of mine action. Many donor States, not directly affected by mine contamination, adopt a cautious approach, favouring established mechanisms over more dynamic funding models. This restraint has limited the sector's capacity to respond to emerging threats and adapt flexibly. Moreover, with a global focus shifting rapidly to new emergencies consuming headlines, funding risks becoming sporadic and reactive, with funding allocations simply following said headlines. Such funding patterns fail to support mine action in a sustainable and predictable way in protracted conflict zones.

So, where do we go from here? The GICHD is confident that the path forward lies in adaptability, innovation, and localization.

To align our efforts with the current operational environment and to address these challenges, the mine action sector should invest in several courses of action at the same time. Notably:

1. **We must strengthen implementation of the APMBC and other relevant instruments, and continue promoting the norm against the use, production and transfer of antipersonnel landmines.** On clearance and risk education, we must leverage the good practices, methods, and approaches that we have developed and refined in decades of experience and that provide solid foundations for efficient, effective and safe operations. This also includes better understanding the evolving modus operandi of armed groups, and how mine action should factor this in. A comprehensive mapping of international law obligations that are relevant to mine action would also prove beneficial, with the goal of identifying possible gaps and ensuring a coherent and integrated approach.
2. **We must embrace innovative solutions and funding models.** Current challenges to mine action call for an innovative response. We must look beyond traditional technological innovation and seek to adopt new processes, partnerships, and financing mechanisms. The immunization sector's front-loading model serves as an instructive example, allowing for immediate, flexible funding with a long-term vision. Similarly, the shift from traditional aid to credit-based models could provide sustainable, reliable funding solutions. This approach may not only accelerate operational capacity but ensure that mine action remains responsive to on-the-ground realities.
3. **We must leverage fully the connections between mine action and broader humanitarian, development and peace efforts.** Since 2017, the GICHD, together with key partners, has

showed the medium and long-term impact of mine action on sustainable development, including through eight country case studies. The Centre also ~~explored~~explored the contribution of mine action to gender equality and women's empowerment in a further three country case studies. These links, which are explicitly acknowledged in the Oslo Action Plan and in the draft Siem Reap Action Plan, should be leveraged to make the case for sustained resourcing of mine action efforts beyond traditional sources, identify synergies and promote cooperation with other sectors. Furthermore, by building on these efforts and continuing to collect evidence of impact, we can demonstrate mine action's impact beyond mere square meters. The tangible benefits to economic growth, stability, gender equality, and social development must be underscored to attract a wider base of stakeholders and secure investment from diverse sectors.

4. **Finally, we must do more to foster localization and national ownership:** Sustainable mine action must prioritize national ownership and local capacity enhancement. This includes nurturing stronger partnerships with national and local organizations, ensuring they have direct funding access, and empowering them with the resources necessary to lead clearance and risk education initiatives in an inclusive manner. Localization, in particular, is not just a rhetorical commitment but an actionable priority that requires concrete steps toward decentralizing operations and investing in local competencies. In fragile contexts such as Afghanistan, direct funding to local actors is vital to overcome operational barriers and securing long-term impact.

The future of mine action depends on our collective ability to adapt, innovate, and build resilience within our systems and frameworks. It is incumbent upon us to build a sector that is not only reactive but anticipatory, capable of addressing the shifting dynamics of modern conflict. The GICHD calls upon all stakeholders - donor states, affected countries, and international organizations - to join in this transformation, fostering a collaborative environment where adaptability, innovation, and localization drive meaningful progress which benefits everyone affected by landmines.

By championing these priorities, we can reshape mine action as a pillar of international stability, human security, and development, ensuring a safer, mine-free future for all. Let us seize this moment to push forward, united in purpose and committed to the shared vision of a world free from the threat of landmines.

Thank you

END