

# GICHD Insights

## THE CATALYTIC ROLE OF MINE ACTION IN PEACE AGREEMENTS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present policy brief examines how the strategic integration of mine action into peace agreements can be a valuable tool for building durable peace. A review of recent ceasefire agreements and comprehensive peace accords (relating to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Yemen) reveals that there is significant variation in how mine action is framed. It ranges from a limited, post-conflict technical activity to a versatile, multi-purpose instrument. The benefits of the use of mine action in peace agreements relate to seven main areas: ceasefire implementation; confidence-building; the enabling of humanitarian access; the facilitation of the return of displaced populations; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; transitional justice; and institution-building.

Agreements that contain clear, verifiable, and resourced mandates for mine action have the potential to deliver tangible peace dividends in the aforementioned areas. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the success of mine action, which is one of many interconnected elements within complex peace processes, is contingent on numerous variables. To harness the full potential of this tool and avoid past failures, the present brief provides recommendations for mediators and other practitioners. These include the early integration of mine action into peace processes as a confidence-building measure; its strategic use to address core conflict grievances; specific mention of the mine action mandate in legal texts to ensure accountability; and its direct linkage to broader development and other global agendas to secure long-term sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

Landmines and other explosive ordnance represent an often underestimated barrier to the achievement of sustainable peace. They not only pose a direct physical threat to civilians, peacekeepers, and humanitarian workers but can also impede the implementation of peace agreements. EO contamination limits economic activity by rendering agricultural land unusable, blocks the safe return of refugees



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and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and prevents the extension of governing authority into post-conflict areas, thereby contributing to the erosion of the foundations of the negotiated settlement.<sup>1</sup> The widespread fear caused by EO contamination can also contribute to stalling reconstruction, as communities may be hesitant to use roads or farmland even after a peace deal has been signed. The practice of clearing explosive ordnance to enable peace is not new, with a history stretching back more than 75 years.<sup>2</sup> Building on this long-standing role, the United Nations Security Council has formally recognized the contribution of mine action and now explicitly encourages its inclusion in peace agreements.<sup>3</sup>

For readers who may be unfamiliar with the term, “mine action” refers to a range of activities designed to reduce the social, economic, and environmental impact of landmines and other explosive ordnance. This includes not only the technical work of land release and destruction but also efforts to educate people about the risks and to provide assistance to victims. While the term “mine action” encompasses this broad range of activities, the provisions of peace agreements tend to focus almost exclusively on the physical removal of EO.

The present policy brief reviews ceasefire agreements and comprehensive peace agreements to analyse the contribution of mine action to peace processes.<sup>4</sup> By examining how mine action has been incorporated in practice, the brief provides actionable lessons to guide practitioners in leveraging mine action as one of many tools for building peace.



GICHD's visit to Cambodia, 2022 © GICHD

## WAYS IN WHICH MINE ACTION CONTRIBUTES TO PEACE PROCESSES

Provisions relating to mine action can deliver multiple benefits that reinforce a peace process. These peace dividends have the potential to demonstrate the concrete value of ending a conflict and to strengthen public support. A sufficient level of detail, however, must be written into the agreement itself and the provisions must be verifiable and the accountability clear. Vague or implicit commitments risk derailing implementation.

### Enabling returns, security, and institution-building

Mine action often serves as a key enabler for the implementation of a peace agreement.

- ▶ **Safe return of displaced populations:** The right of return of refugees and IDPs is a cornerstone of many agreements. The link with mine action can be explicit or implicit. For example, although the 1995 Dayton Accords for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>5</sup> established a right of return without specifying mine action as a precondition, their implementation was heavily reliant on clearance. In contrast, the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements ending the conflict in Cambodia explicitly linked the two, mandating the “clearing of mines from repatriation routes, reception centres and resettlement areas”.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ **Security and monitoring:** Peacekeepers and ceasefire monitors cannot deploy, patrol, or verify troop withdrawals as effectively in mined areas. The 2004 ceasefire agreement in Sudan, for example, identified that clearance was a precondition “necessary for deployment of the UN Peace Support Mission”.<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ **Institution-building:** The extension or re-establishment of governing administration requires the safe and free movement of officials and citizens, to which mine action can contribute. The 2000 agreement on the cessation of hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia explicitly created this link, with clearance described as a condition necessary for “the return of civilian administration”.<sup>8</sup>

## Enabling economic revival and the restoration of services

For civilians emerging from conflict, the ability to resume normal life safely is a key element in making peace tangible. Mine action can facilitate this transition in several ways. The clearing of agricultural land allows farmers to plant crops again, and the opening of roads reconnects markets and restores trade.<sup>9</sup> The restoration of livelihoods can tangibly support the easing of economic challenges that can fuel a conflict. The process of the clearance, however, is as important as the outcome. In order to build trust that the land is truly free from explosive ordnance, there must be effective community engagement throughout the land-release process, and, upon completion, the handover must be transparent and inclusive.<sup>10</sup> While economic revival is a theme that is common in peace and ceasefire agreements, it less frequently relates specifically to mine action, although it is mentioned explicitly in the 2016 Colombia agreement<sup>11</sup> and the 2005<sup>12</sup> and 2020<sup>13</sup> agreements relating to Sudan.

### Building confidence

The act of exchanging information on mine locations, as required for example in the 1995 Dayton Accords for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the 2016 Colombia agreement, can serve as a powerful confidence-building measure. It is an opportunity for parties to demonstrate good faith and build the habit of cooperation.

In Cyprus, UN-facilitated demining within the buffer zone has been a recurring confidence-building measure, creating a framework for practical cooperation between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities even when high-level political negotiations have stalled.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, on the Korean Peninsula, joint demining in the Demilitarized Zone has been proposed as an entry point for de-escalation and trustbuilding between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, within the countries of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, mine action is promoted as a practical confidence- and security-building measure that can help manage and even resolve conflicts by creating transparency and opportunities for dialogue between opposing forces.<sup>16</sup>



## As a component of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, and transitional justice

Perhaps the most strategic framing of mine action transforms ex-combatants into active peacebuilders.

- ▶ **Creating roles for ex-combatants:** The 2016 Colombia agreement and the 2019 accord in Mozambique<sup>17</sup> provide for the incorporation of former combatants into clearance programmes linked to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts to provide them with decent employment, internationally recognized technical skills, and a respected status in their communities. This directly addresses one challenge of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, which is to prevent demobilized fighters from returning to violence because of a lack of economic opportunity.<sup>18</sup>
- ▶ **Transitional/reparative justice:** When ex-combatants are involved in clearing land that they themselves may have contaminated, as is envisioned in Colombia's transitional justice framework, it becomes a powerful act of restorative justice. The act of clearance then becomes a contribution to the healing of the communities that the combatants once harmed. It is a practical form of reparation and a step towards reconciliation.<sup>19</sup>

## Approaches to framing mine action in peace agreements

There is a notable variation in how mine action is framed in peace agreements, particularly according to the type of agreement concluded. In limited ceasefire contexts, mine action is often presented solely as an operational requirement. The 2010 agreement between the Government of Yemen and the Houthis, for example, lists the requirement to “remove land mines” alongside other immediate military orders such as “open the roads”.<sup>20</sup> The function of mine action here is purely to facilitate the cessation of hostilities.

In contrast, more comprehensive peace accords have used mine action in a much more integrated and strategic manner. The 2016 Colombia agreement provides a clear model for this approach. It creates a detailed protocol in which clearance is not a stand-alone task but explicitly woven into the broader architecture of the peace deal. Mine action is simultaneously a component of the process of laying down arms, a pathway for the reincorporation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) into civilian life, and a form of reparation for victims. This demonstrates that the potential utility of mine action is determined by its design.

## Conflict sensitivity and political complexities

The inclusion of mine action in peace efforts can be highly politicized and does not automatically guarantee success. On its own, mine action cannot resolve core political disputes. Externally driven demining efforts can sometimes clash with local needs and the political reality. For example, in Casamance, Senegal, local communities and separatist forces actively resisted demining efforts, viewing them as a way for authorities to extend their control and to secure resource-rich land for development projects. These groups perceived demining as a form of disarmament that made them vulnerable, while their claims to self-determination were ignored. If communities perceive mine action as continuing conflict dynamics or unresolved grievances, it can generate resistance and fail to contribute to lasting peace.<sup>21</sup> This highlights the importance of ensuring that mine action provisions in peace agreements are based on analysis of specific conflict sensitivities and tailored to the sociopolitical context. An additional complexity is that clearing land can inadvertently create or reignite disputes over housing, land, and property (HLP) rights if ownership is unclear. To prevent demining from becoming a source of secondary conflict, mine action programming must be integrated with HLP expertise to ensure that land release is managed equitably and transparently.<sup>22</sup>



# MINE ACTION IN PEACE AGREEMENTS

The preceding sections illustrate the various ways in which mine action has contributed to formal peace processes. The present section collates those and other examples from more than a dozen peace and ceasefire agreements concluded since the early 1990s in an original framework that classifies the functions of mine action provisions into seven distinct, though often overlapping, categories:

- 1. Component of ceasefire implementation
- 2. Confidence-building measure
- 3. Enabler of humanitarian access and operations
- 4. Condition for IDP/refugee return and resettlement
- 5. Component of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
- 6. Element of transitional justice and reparation
- 7. Function of institution-building and security-sector reform

The following table presents the strategic implications for mine action practitioners and provides specific examples corresponding to each of the seven categories.



Field visit in Ukraine, 2024 © GICHD

## Classification of mine action provisions in peace and ceasefire agreements

Function of mine action	Description	Strategic implication for practitioners	Examples of the mine action function in ceasefire and peace agreements (nonexhaustive)
1. Component of ceasefire implementation	Mine action as a technical, mandatory component of the cessation of hostilities, such as the clearing of separation zones or access routes.	Contributes to the viability of a ceasefire by creating safe conditions for disengagement and monitoring, making the agreement operational.	Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995): Removal/destruction of mines and unexploded ordnance within 30 days; monitoring by an “Implementation Force”.  Myanmar (2015): <sup>23</sup> Demining to be undertaken.  Sierra Leone (1999): <sup>24</sup> Monitoring by a Joint Monitoring Commission.  Sudan (2005): The laying of mines prohibited; demining to be conducted in coordination with the United Nations.
2. Confidence-building measure	Mine action framed as a cooperative act to build trust, such as the mandatory exchange of minefield data or joint surveys.	Provides a practical, less politically contentious issue on which parties can demonstrate good faith and build cooperative habits.	Colombia (2016): Joint demining by the Government of Colombia and the FARC as a confidence-building measure.  Myanmar (2015): Coordination between the Government armed forces and ethnic armed organizations on mine action as a confidence-building measure.  Nepal (2006): <sup>25</sup> Joint mapping of landmines.  Sudan (2002): <sup>26</sup> Joint mapping of mines in the Nuba Mountains.



Function of mine action	Description	Strategic implication for practitioners	Examples of the mine action function in ceasefire and peace agreements (non-exhaustive)
<b>3. Enabler of humanitarian access and operations</b>	Mine action focused on the clearing of routes and areas to allow for the safe delivery of aid and the safe movement of personnel.	Addresses urgent civilian needs directly, demonstrating the immediate benefits of peace and bolstering the credibility of the agreement.	Burundi (2000): <sup>27</sup> The marking of contaminated areas and the creation of humanitarian corridors.  Colombia (2016): Rural demining for aid access.  Sudan (2005): Demining for deployment of the UN Peace Support Mission.
<b>4. Condition for IDP/ refugee return and resettlement</b>	Demining is explicitly linked to the right of return of displaced populations, with a focus on their homes and agricultural land.	Helps make the fundamental right of return a practical reality, restoring livelihoods and addressing a core grievance of displaced communities.	Cambodia (1991): Clearance of mines from repatriation routes, reception centres, and resettlement areas.  Eritrea and Ethiopia (2000): Clearance to create conditions for return.  Sudan (2005): Clearance for the return of displaced populations.
<b>5. Component of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration</b>	Mine action is integrated into the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process, often with the involvement of ex-combatants in clearance activities.	Provides constructive, paid employment for ex-combatants, reducing the risk of their return to violence owing to lack of opportunity.	Colombia (2016): Ex-combatants of the FARC employed in demining (socioeconomic reintegration).  Mozambique (2019): Inclusion of excombatants in mine action through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration activities.
<b>6. Element of transitional justice and reparation</b>	Mine action activities are used as a form of providing reparation to victims and communities.	Transforms a technical activity into one that contributes to community reconciliation.	Colombia (2016): Demining by the FARC as a form of restorative justice and reparation to victims.
<b>7. Function of Institution-building and security-sector reform</b>	National institutions are tasked with overseeing mine action, thereby building governing capacity and legitimacy.	Fosters national ownership and helps develop the capacity of security organs in critical public-safety functions.	Eritrea and Ethiopia (2000): Clearance for the return of the civilian administration.  Multiple agreements: The establishment of a national mine action authority.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis of the agreements in the table above demonstrates how mine action can be a tool that contributes to building peace. As one component of a holistic and cooperative peace strategy, it can be a catalyst for tangible change. The challenge for diplomats, mediators, and peacebuilders is to apply comprehensively the lessons that can be drawn from the following recommendations:



### 1. Integrate mine action into peace efforts early and strategically

Mine action should not be an afterthought. It is a tool that should be used throughout the peace process. As the seven categories illustrate, its function can be adapted to fit the different stages of the process, from early mediation to long-term implementation and reconciliation. Mediators should introduce mine action in talks early as a potential confidence-building mechanism that can build momentum for tackling more difficult political issues. At the same time, its application in areas like disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, transitional justice, and institution-building makes it relevant across the entire lifecycle of a peace agreement.

### 2. Tailor the way in which mine action is framed in the agreement to address the conflict's core grievances

Mine action can be framed in ceasefire and peace agreements in multiple ways. To maximize its impact and secure buy-in from the parties, it should be seen as aligning with the specific context of the conflict. In a conflict driven by economic marginalization, it should be framed as a pillar of livelihood recovery. In a context requiring deep societal healing, it can be framed as an act of reparative justice.

### 3. Ensure that agreement texts are specific and contain timelines and provision for the verification of implementation

Ambiguity can hinder implementation. Agreements should move beyond general commitments, specifying (a) what will be cleared (e.g. specific transport corridors, districts, or infrastructure); (b) who is responsible (e.g. national authorities, a joint body, or ex-combatants as part of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration processes); (c) by when the clearance will occur (e.g. the inclusion of clear timelines linked to other political milestones, such as elections or troop withdrawals); and (d) who will verify compliance (e.g. a UN mission with a clear mandate, such as the United Nations Mine Action Service, or a credible regional body).

### 4. Link mine action explicitly to broader reconstruction and development agendas.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of mine action and related funding, it must be woven into the wider fabric of post-conflict frameworks. Peace agreements should link clearance plans to national development strategies, to plans for security-sector reform (e.g. by defining the role of national security forces in clearance), commitments under agendas such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and to budgets for the return of displaced populations and reconstruction. This approach, advocated in the United Nations Mine Action Strategy,<sup>28</sup> prevents mine action from being siloed and anchors it in long-term institution-building, making it a core development activity.

### 5. Secure dedicated funding and ensure clear implementation and monitoring mandates

Peace agreements should be accompanied by a robust resource mobilization plan for mine action activities. Furthermore, the mandate of any monitoring body, whether it be a UN mission or a regional entity, must explicitly include the verification of mine action commitments. This body must be granted the authority and unfettered access required to monitor and report on non-compliance.





GICHD's visit to Ecuador, 2023 © GICHD

While implementation remains irregular, the international legal framework has evolved to support the contribution of mine action to peacebuilding. The first stand-alone resolution on mine action by the United Nations Security Council,<sup>29</sup> adopted in 2017, formally recognized the “positive contribution that mine action activities make to stabilization and peace sustainment efforts in the aftermath of conflict”. The resolution explicitly encourages the inclusion of mine action in relevant ceasefire and peace agreements, creating a clear path for practitioners to treat it as an integral element of peacebuilding. It is now important to ensure that this recognition translates into consistent practice, so that future peace accords utilize the full potential of mine action to transform contaminated territories from legacies of conflict into the basis for lasting and sustainable peace.

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## Endnotes

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The GICHD works to reduce risks to communities stemming from explosive ordnance, with a focus on landmines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war, and unsafely and insecurely managed conventional ammunition. As an internationally recognized centre of expertise and knowledge, the GICHD helps national authorities, international and regional organizations, NGOs and operators in around 40 affected countries and territories to develop and professionalize mine action and ammunition management.

Through its work, the GICHD strives for the fulfilment of international obligations, for national targets to be reached, and communities' protection from and resilience to explosive harm to be enhanced. These efforts support sustainable livelihoods, gender equality and inclusion. They save lives, facilitate the safe return of displaced populations, and promote peace and sustainable development.