

OTTAWA INTERSESSIONAL, 8 – 9 JUNE 2017

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON

IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 5

Mr Chair,

I must first point out that the United Kingdom held a General Election yesterday, 8 June. Until we have a new Government in place the statement I am about to make sets out the long-standing British view on implementation of the Ottawa Convention.

As this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor, I wish to thank you for all the hard work that has been put into the organisation of this meeting, particularly against the backdrop of increasing financial difficulties. It is imperative that all states recognise the importance of making their financial contributions to the costs of holding meetings 90 days in advance of that planned meeting. I would also like to thank the Implementation Support Unit and the Committees for their role in enabling our discussions. The UK has always been a strong supporter of the work and goals of the Convention.

I thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the UK's actions to implement clearance of mined areas in the Falkland Islands. The UK announced on 14 September 2016 the commitment of a further £20m to continue the removal of anti-personnel mines from the Falkland Islands. This new phase of demining, Phase 5, represents a significant increase in the UK's demining efforts. Phase 5 began in October 2016 and is already progressing well. So far it has cleared 18 mined areas, totaling nearly 124 thousand square metres. We expect this Phase to clear at least 46 minefields, and complete technical survey in a further 27 minefields, which aims to provide a more accurate picture of the clearance challenge that remains.

The UK would like to inform the Convention that a minor incident occurred on 27 February. During routine demining, a Team Leader suffered minor injuries to his hand following an explosion. Investigation by both the Land Release Contractor and the Demining Project Office concluded there had been no fault in standard operating procedures or the team leader's conduct. Remedial actions, such as refresher training, have been implemented.

I would like to reiterate that there have never been any Falkland Island civilian casualties caused by landmines. However, this incident will remind us all that demining does, by its nature, involve risk. That is why the UK ensures that contractors implementing projects have strict and well-tested safety and casualty evacuation procedures. Both contractors working on this project have a strong safety record.

Mr Chair,

The Falkland Islands continue to pose a unique challenge for demining operations. The remote location, adverse weather conditions, the environmental consequences of demining, capacity limits of the Islands to provide certain facilities for demining, (for example, medical evacuation), the fact that some minefields never had minefield records, and the tough financial climate are all factors the United Kingdom must contend with in taking forward this work. These factors will become increasingly more significant as we begin to tackle the more remote, technically-challenging and environmentally-sensitive minefields.

The previous four phases of demining have made good progress, and we now look forward to successful implementation of Phase 5. I would like to note that the small humanitarian and socio-economic impact of the remaining mined areas in the Falkland Islands decreases as the mined areas closest to population centres are cleared. Most of the remaining mined areas are in extremely remote locations, and pose negligible risk to civilians. As such, the UK considers the Falkland Islands to be 'mine-impact free'.

The UK remains committed to transparency with regards to its obligations under the Convention and will continue to provide updates on progress and share lessons learned.

Thank you.