

Opening of the 2021 Intersessional Meetings

H.E. Robbert Gabriëlse, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Netherlands,
Ambassador-at-large for Disarmament Affairs
President of the Nineteenth Meeting of the States Parties

Excellencies, dear friends,

It is my pleasure to see many of you joining us here today for this year's Intersessional Meetings.

Unfortunately we continue in the virtual modality but I do hope things will further improve and we will host you in person in November in the Hague.

It has certainly been a difficult year for all of you and many around the world.

I would like to start these meetings by thanking my predecessor, **Ambassador Osman Abufatima Adam Mohammed** of Sudan who ensured a successful year in 2020 despite the restrictions and obstacles posed by the global pandemic. My hat is off to him as I now know the challenges he had to face.

The Covid pandemic is receding in many countries but the recovery is not everywhere happening and several countries continue to struggle with the situation.

Despite the challenges we have been facing, as a demining community we have been able to come together and continue our important work.

We have innovated to continue protecting vulnerable populations, we have altered our methodologies and forged new partnerships. We have shown flexibility and adaptability, anchoring all our efforts on the well-being of mine affected communities.

This is certainly a testament to our collective understanding that anti-personnel mines have no place in this world and that the plight of mine survivors needs to be addressed from a human rights perspective. I commend all of you for your continued efforts.

It is also critical for us to ensure that the global pandemic and the short term disruptions do not cause long term disruption to our work. In particular, we need to ensure that international and national funds continue to be earmarked for mine action. This will take all of us pulling in the same direction.

Dear friends, last year we celebrated the Eighteenth Meeting of the States Parties where we established a baseline for implementation of the Oslo Action Plan. At the Nineteenth Meeting of the States Parties we will have to opportunity to see how far we have come in a year.

Over the years we have made significant progress, but some challenges still remain. I have no doubt that together we can overcome the challenges and continue progress towards our common goal of "ending the suffering and casualties" caused by anti-personnel mines. We must not lose sight of this goal. We must not forget the lifesaving work we are contributing to. This is not simply processes and document but our efforts have real consequences.

The Intersessional Meetings offer us an opportunity to make progress in this regard, by looking at key actions of the Oslo Action Plan. We encourage all mine affected states to participate actively in our discussion of the next three days.

We welcome all of you making use of the informal nature of these meetings to share your perspectives on the different thematic areas we will be exploring in the next days.

Before I end my preliminary remarks, dear Colleagues, I like to add the following.

We are in a very important moment with the Convention. We continue to experience a number of conflicts around the globe where anti-personnel mines are being employed. According to the UNHCR there are approximately 82 million displaced people, many of these are internally displaced persons in conflict areas.

We need to ensure that our Convention remains the framework to address the scourge of anti-personnel mines for so many innocent victims and that we do not compromise with the norms the Convention has established.

Any use of mines and any suggestions that these weapons can be used responsibly, needs to be condemned and any non-compliance matters with our Convention needs to be addressed swiftly and with resolve.

I take this opportunity to, on behalf of all of us, express my sincere condolences to the recent atrocities committed upon the staff of the HALO Trust in Afghanistan and on the people of Afghanistan. I believe all of us working with mine action were revolted by these deplorable acts. It is a sad reminder of the threat faced by deminers working in volatile conditions.

We certainly stand with the HALO Trust and Afghanistan.

We will hear from the HALO Trust later this session.

Now ladies and gentlemen allow me to offer the floor to the GICHD Director, Ambassador Stefano Toscano, for some opening remarks. Stefano, thank you very much for the support of the GICHD. The ISU has particularly made me aware of the great contribution of your staff, particularly Ms. Susanne Rihs Aeby and Ms. Laetitia Roch.

Stefano – we are very grateful for Switzerland and the GICHD's continued support to these meetings and your organisation's commitment to provide States Parties with technical support to meet their commitments.

Thank you, Stefano.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before we close this opening session, allow me to offer the floor to James Cowen, Director of the HALO Trust who has asked to take the floor to say a few words.

Thank you very much James for the HALO Trusts work and, once again our most heartfelt condolences.

At this stage, I would like to ask you all to join me for a moment of silence in remembrance for the colleagues of the HALO Trust and all others who have been killed or injured in the service of mine action.

[Moment of silence]

Thank you. Dear Colleagues, I look forward to seeing all you join us for the next three days and thank you once gain for all your implementation efforts. Do not hesitate to request the floor, to react to the conversation.

As I mentioned earlier, keep it technical, keep it productive, we have a lot of work to do.