

ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE BAN CONVENTION
16th MEETING OF STATES PARTIES
18-21 DECEMBER 2017

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT ON COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

1. The United Kingdom aligns itself with the statement of the European Union, and will make some additional remarks in its national capacity. Twenty years on from the adoption of the Ottawa Convention, landmines remain a global scourge. These indiscriminate weapons of war maim and kill, long after conflict has stopped. They continue to devastate lives, often in the very places where people are already marginalised and excluded. Landmines are a major threat to the immediate physical safety and longer-term development of communities. Landmines prevent use of agricultural land, and they curtail access to essential health or education services. They must be tackled.
2. The UK has played a historic role in tackling the indiscriminate and lethal legacy of landmines. That role was, of course, embodied by the efforts twenty years ago of Her Royal Highness, Diana, Princess of Wales, bringing landmines to the world's attention, and bringing us together to sign this Convention. We are proud that the Convention is now one of the world's most widely accepted treaties. The UK was one of the founding signatories, and since then we have become one of the world's leading donors on mine action. UK organisations are at the forefront of global efforts. But there is still more to do. Landmines continue to be used as a weapon of war.
3. This is why the UK has tripled its funding for mine action. In April, the UK Secretary of State for International Development announced that the UK will spend £100 million over the next three years to tackle the humanitarian and development impact of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. This support will clear and make safe 150 square kilometres of land, help 800,000 people live their lives free from the threat of mines, and ensure that every year, over 100,000 people – especially children – fully understand the dangers posed by landmines and how to avoid them. With this funding, the UK will work in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Cambodia, helping to deliver real and lasting peace and stability. Our focus will be on countries where the greatest numbers of people continue to suffer from landmine contamination; where we can have the biggest impact; and where continued insecurity and instability pose an ongoing threat to UK interests.
4. This increased funding builds further on the UK's existing £30 million Global Mine Action Programme, which ran for the last three years from July 2014 to August 2017. UK-funded work in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, South Sudan, Somalia, Burma and Zimbabwe focused on mine clearance; mine risk education; and providing support to national demining authorities in meeting their obligations under the Convention. This is why, in Vietnam, in addition to clearance and mine risk education, UK support assists national authorities in linking their strategies to the provincial socio-economic development plans and through the establishment of provincial level coordination centres. For a beneficiary in Zimbabwe, our mine clearance work has meant reducing travel time to his farm by half.

And our mine risk education programmes have reached more than 426,000 people this year, including near 360,000 women and children.

5. In addition to the UK's Global Mine Action programme, the UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund also supports a number of mine action programmes around the world. This Fund had an allocated budget of over £8million for demining activity for the last year. In Eastern Ukraine, this UK programme supported the humanitarian and recovery needs of 5,500 direct beneficiaries and 60,000 indirect beneficiaries. In the Caucasus, on-going UK support contributed to the clearance of all known minefields in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia. And emergency UK funding in 2017 helped clear up after an arms depot explosion. The UK supported the clearance of minefields around four former Soviet military bases in Georgia; which has allowed internally displaced people to return to their homes and begin farming again. UK funding in Azerbaijan will clear over 650,000 square metres by March 2018. This will help support local economies, primarily through clearing access to agricultural land, directly benefitting 2000 people.
6. In Sri Lanka, an area of over 273,000 square meters has been cleared in the last year, removing nearly 4,000 anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines, UXO, and small arms ammunitions. This has improved the lives of over 15,000 (direct and indirect) beneficiaries, including women and children. Over 17,000 individuals in Sri Lanka are now better informed about the risk of mines and what to do if one is discovered. UK support continued after clearance, providing temporary shelters, toilet facilities, wells and freeing up agricultural land for 130 war affected individuals. In Yemen, over 4,000,000 square metres have been cleared and further surveys continue. And in Afghanistan, over 193,000 families have benefited from cleared lands during a 10 year programme of UK funding of over £20million.
7. The UK attaches a great deal of importance to gender-awareness in its programmes. Mine action is most effective where it takes the different needs of women, girls, men and boys into account. In Zimbabwe, for instance, we have increased awareness among women by aligning delivery of mine risk educational sessions to activities such as the collection of water. In Sri Lanka, currently, over 40% of the demining staff are female - and 62% of these female demining staff are the primary breadwinners of their family.
8. However, the UK does not discriminate against, or among, persons with disabilities, whether they be victims of anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions, armed conflict, or disabled through illness or accident. Support should be non-discriminatory and should aim to improve capacity in a sustainable manner. The UK's experience has shown that we are best placed to make an impact on mine affected communities when we use a range of mechanisms to affect change across the five pillars of clearance, mine risk education, stockpile destruction, victim assistance and advocacy.
9. Significantly, the UK is focused on supporting people with disabilities and is committed to transforming the lives of people living with disabilities. In July 2018, the UK will host its first-ever Global Disability Summit. This Summit will bring together global leaders, technology companies and charities, in London, to tackle the barriers that prevent people living with disabilities in the world's poorest countries from reaching their full potential.

10. In closing, the UK is proud to have always been a strong supporter of the Convention's goals, and is proud to continue to offer substantial assistance globally. And by doing so, we will honour the work of those who have come before us and provide hope to future generations. This is one of the many ways that UK aid can, and is, making the world safer, healthier and more prosperous for us all. We encourage all States Parties to augment their efforts where possible to help us collectively tackle the scourge of landmines.