



## **THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

**Twenty-First Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention**

**Geneva, 20-24 November 2023**

### **Statement**

**Agenda item 10. Consideration of the general status and operation of the Convention**

**CLEARING MINED AREAS AND MINE RISK EDUCATION AND REDUCTION:**

**Conclusions and recommendations related to the mandate of the Committee on Article 5**

**Implementation**

**Ministry of the Interior  
Civil Protection Directorate**

**NOVEMBER 2023**

Mr President, excellences', distinguished delegates of the member states, colleagues and stakeholders of the global mine action system,

the Republic of Croatia aligns itself with the comprehensive EU statement and continues to, within its implementation bodies, express continuous support and implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in all its aspects, namely by honouring and fulfilling undertaken obligations regarding the land release milestones, while strongly advocating for the implementation of the transparency measures, providing assistance to victims of mines and UXOs and developing international cooperation, meanwhile ensuring full universalization and implementation of the Convention in line with the Oslo Action Plan.

Important achievements and positive trends in Mine Action in the period since the last Meeting of the State Parties confirm Croatia's commitment in fulfilling the obligations and goals of the Convention. During 2022, 55.2 km<sup>2</sup> were released including 40.2 km<sup>2</sup> by clearance and 15.0 km<sup>2</sup> by Non-technical and Technical survey, which altogether resulted with 1.098 Anti-Personnel mines, 25 Anti-Tank mines, 2.400 unexploded ordnances found and destroyed. In addition, an area of 488.200 m<sup>2</sup> under the authority of the MoD (military areas) was cleared which resulted with 9 AP mines and 1 AT mine found and destroyed along with 711 UXOs eliminated as well. Moreover, a MoD authority area of 9.2 km<sup>2</sup> was also released by the Non-Technical Survey activities performed within the MoD Pioneer battalion in partnership with the Mol/Civil Protection Directorate/CROMAC staff during 2022. Furthermore, up to 1 November 2023, additional 40 km<sup>2</sup> were released, including 28 km<sup>2</sup> by clearance and 12 km<sup>2</sup> by survey activities.

The Annual Mine Action Plan was financed by the State Budget funds and EU funding. It is important to mention that, like in the previous reporting year, in 2022, funds acquired for the demining operations from the EU contribution were significant. In 2022 the state budget had the biggest financing share with 68 % of the realized funds, while the EU funds contributed with almost 30 %. In the 2014-2020 financial perspective, EU funds were used to clear almost 59 km<sup>2</sup> of challenging nature protected areas as a part of "Naturavita", "Fearless Velebit" and "Karlovac Karst" projects, a last in line clearance project that was finalized in 2022 releasing 17.1 km<sup>2</sup> of predominately nature protected areas, establishing preconditions for sustainable development and revitalization of forests along with accompanying fire protection efforts.

Parallel with the implementation of the Non-technical and Technical survey activities and Clearance operations, the control of the marking of the hazardous areas was conducted, concluding the 2022 with 6.255 mine warning signs, which means 22% reduced number of mine warning signs in comparison with the previous reporting year. Unfortunately, even with widely organized marking activities in the Republic of Croatia, during 2022 there was 1 accounted mine accident resulting with the light injury for the auxiliary worker during one of the clearance projects. Mentioned EO incident occurred during November in the Lika-Senj County, when auxiliary worker during machine clearance activated PROM-1 bounding fragmentation AP mine in the marked hazardous area. Unfortunately, mine accidents continued in the beginning of 2023 when we had 2 mine accidents with three casualties. During January 2023, a hunter/civilian died from the bounding fragmentation AP mine PROM-1 in the market border area. Same AP mine was the cause of another fatal outcome when two deminers, male and female, died during clearance activities in February 2023. All of this, once again, proves the deadly legacy and impact of landmines even more than 27 years after they were

emplaced, which, in the case of the Republic of Croatia, increased the number of fatal outcomes to 207 people, from the end of the Homeland war, up to date.

The remaining challenge, which will be confronted in accordance with the Revised Mine Action plan for the remaining period of the Second Extension request, on the 1 November 2023 continued inside 26 Municipalities / 6 Counties with the incentive that, at the end of 2023, the Republic of Croatia will completely release another 2 Counties – Šibensko-Kninska and Osječko-baranjska – reducing remaining Counties to four and approximately 100 sq. kilometres of hazardous areas which will be released, in accordance with the work plans, in the remaining 2 years period.

In the legislative and implementation terms, the Republic of Croatia devotes special efforts in the Explosive Ordnances Risk Education programmes as the best form of preventative action. In 2022, all EORE activities were coordinated within the Civil Protection Directorate (CPD) of the Ministry of Interior, and directly provided or with the support of the National educational centre of the civil protection - which is an organizational sector within the CPD. In 2022, a total of 193 EORE were held including a total of about 11,473 people, mostly elementary school age, as well as the target population of the local inhabitants of municipalities and cities within the hazardous areas. Majority of EORE was organized as a part of EU funded project – “NATURAVITA” as one of the largest nature conservation projects in Croatia, financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds, which included 101 educational lectures of 3.943 elementary school pupils from Osijek-Baranja County, one of the remaining 6 Counties with confirmed hazardous areas. In addition, a specific EORE education was created and conducted for the children from Ukraine which were staying in Croatia during 2022 as a part of broader, war relief, NGO and National partnership efforts.

Republic of Croatia has also devoted significant individual efforts in providing assistance and in exchange of knowledge and experience in the field of Mine Action, while also aligning itself within the broader European Union efforts in supporting the Mine Action challenges resulting from Russia's illegal, senseless and brutal war of aggression against Ukraine.

In that regard, during 2022, Republic of Croatia donated certain amount of PPE (protective vests and helmets) and metal detectors to Ukraine NMAA in support of Mine Action efforts, in addition to 5 million EUR of direct support for the clearance activities and equipment within the UNDP and World Food Programme partnership. Furthermore, Ukraine Mine Action efforts were presented as a major Programme theme of the annual 18th International Symposium “Mine Action 2022” which was held in May, 2022 in Croatia, and allowed for technical information exchange bringing together more than 140 participants from 26 countries discussing various Mine Action topics.

The Republic of Croatia is especially proud to be able to host The International Donors’ Conference on Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine, which was held in Zagreb on 11 and 12 October 2023, and brought together the ministers and officials responsible for humanitarian demining and other representatives of 34 Countries alongside Croatia and Ukraine as co-chairs of the Conference, with the European Commission, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, UNDP, UNOPS and WFP present as well.

The participants of the ministerial discussion during the First day have been made fully aware of the magnitude and gravity of mine contamination in Ukraine caused by the Russian aggression, as well as Ukraine’s needs for the purpose of clearance of the contaminated territories. In addition, they have

recognized the need for strengthening Ukrainian capacities for Mine Action in the scope of Humanitarian Demining as well as the support for the implementation of the announced National Mine Action Strategy of Ukraine, focusing on the production of demining equipment, identifying demining priorities, establishing appropriate co-ordination mechanisms, and ensuring transparency and accountability in the use of funds, equipment and other means intended for these purposes. We can conclude that the financial pledges of the participant states have exceeded expectations in a sense that almost half a billion of Euros have been promised for the support of humanitarian demining efforts of Ukraine which has undoubtedly stated a clear political support to Ukraine Humanitarian Mine Action efforts.

After the first ministerial high level pledging day, The International Donors' Conference on Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine continued with the Expert level discussions during the Second day gathering more than 150 participants, experts in Mine Action, who took part in four thematic panel discussions.

1st Panel discussion named "Explosive Ordnance contamination problem in Ukraine - needs in the field of Mine Action" included presentations and statements of participants from the Ukrainian Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of the Defence. During this the updated status of Mine Action Strategy of Ukraine was presented with a goal of finalization of the document at the end of 2023. Also the representatives of the Ministry of Economy informed the Mine Action Community with their challenges in data gathering and processing of the information regarding contaminated areas in line with the IMSMA procedures. The representatives of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine have displayed the updated contamination situation, priorities and the most pressing needs in the field of Mine Action including various trainings, EOD equipment, vehicles and machinery highlighting the goal of equipping 5000 personnel for the clearance and EOD activities.

2nd Panel discussion "Financial instruments and the possibilities of financing of the Mine Action in Ukraine" gathered views from the EU perspective throughout Foreign Policy Instrument of the European External Action Service, updated information regarding the NATO Comprehensive Assistance Package, efforts and views on the subject matter from the point of the representatives of Canada and USA and their Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. Relevant discussions were channelled towards finding the answers on the matter of how can Ukraine show results for Humanitarian Mine Action projects in a way that helps donors advocate for more funding and what steps should Ukraine Government do to attract new donors concerning this topic of interest.

3rd Panel discussion named "Croatian Mine Action System - knowledge and experience, capabilities, capacities and opportunities in providing assistance to Ukraine in the field of Mine Action" presented views from the point of Croatian Mine Action Centre now part of the Croatian Civil Protection Directorate, CROMAC – Centre for Testing, Development and Training which is a Limited Liability Company established as the institution for performing testing, research, development and EOD education in the field of Mine Action in the Republic of Croatia, mechanical clearance solutions and new technologies from the point of the Croatian Defence Industry Competitiveness Cluster with a final presentation involving support for Mine Victims in the experience of the NGO Association "Croatia Helps".

4th and final Panel discussion “Strengthening Ukrainian capacities for Mine Action - experiences of leading experts/producers in the field of Mine Action” presented views and experience from the UNDP, GICHD, United Nation World Food Programme and Japan International Cooperation Agency with a conclusions involving emphasis on capacity development of an institution designated for the Humanitarian Mine Action, which should be accompanied with a combination of provided equipment and training, needs for expediting the land release processes in the low risk areas using various remote tools, alignment with a National Mine Action Strategy of Ukraine alongside of implementation of new technologies with an attitude of long-term commitment.

Overall, we can conclude that the participants as well as numerous involved audience interventions and questions concerning the expert thematic panels have examined different demining models suitable for Ukraine, along with the needed capabilities and capacities for the provision of support to Ukraine’s demining system, while proposing the way forward for strengthening the Ukrainian Humanitarian Mine Action System, expertise and co-ordination mechanisms. In addition of hosting this first international donor conference, the Republic of Croatia has initiated and mobilized its Mine Action knowledge by signing the bilateral Agreement on the cooperation in the field of Mine Action with Ukraine.

All of the mentioned important achievements and positive trends in Mine Action in the period since the last Extension request of the Republic of Croatia confirm our commitment towards fulfilling the obligations and goals of the Convention. With the continued upward trend of ensuring financial means, emphasizing the EU role in supporting the efforts in the 2021-2027 financial perspective, Croatia is on track to meet its commitments within the deadlines as defined in the 2nd Extension, contributing in the best possible way to the goal we all strive for together – a mine-free world!