

## Somalia's Mine Action Programme: Overview of Remaining Challenges and Needs

Thursday, 23 November 2023

### Introduction

On 23 November 2023, Somalia and the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, with the support of the Implementation Support Unit, invited State and civil society representatives to engage in an open and frank discussion regarding Somalia's needs and challenges in implementing its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention.

Participants received an invitation package including; an agenda, and background information including Somalia's updated action plan for implementation of Somalia's mine clearance obligations under Article 5 of the Convention. These documents, together with the presentation delivered by Somalia will be made available on Somalia's country page of the Convention website<sup>1</sup>.

### Participants

States: Canada, Japan, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom.

Organizations: Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM), European Union, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), The HALO Trust, Implementation Support Unit of the Convention on Cluster Munitions, International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), Mine Action Review, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit.

### Opening

Opening remarks were provided by Thailand, Chair of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance, and Mr. Dahir Abdurahman Abdulle, Director General, Somalia Explosive Management Authority (SEMA). Mr. Abdulkadir Ibrahim Mohamed, Head of Information Management, SEMA delivered a presentation on the status and remaining challenge in implementation of Somalia's Article 5 obligations. Mr. Dan Richards, Operations Manager, The HALO Trust, provided a presentation on behalf of implementing partners in Somalia. Participants then engaged in an informal discussion concerning Somalia's remaining challenge and requirements for support.

### Overview of Somalia's Remaining Challenges and Needs

**Mr. Abdulkadir Ibrahim Mohamed**, Head of Information Management, SEMA, provided a brief history of armed conflict in Somalia. Mr. Mohamed also provided an overview of Somalia's remaining challenge, noting that the majority of minefields are located in border areas between Somalia and Ethiopia. Mr. Mohamed also mentioned the presence of explosive remnants of war as well as the increasing use of improvised explosive devices (IED), including anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature.

Mr. Mohamed provided data on the impact on the civilian population, including children, with 36 casualties registered in 2022 caused by explosive ordnance, including 24% from anti-tank mines, and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apminebanconvention.org/en/membership/somalia/>

768 casualties from (IED) during the same period, (including a significant number of civilians affected by anti-personnel mines of improvised nature).

Mr. Mohamed outlined five key challenges in addressing Somalia's remaining challenge; a) limited international support, noting only two organisations supporting clearance of anti-personnel mines, b) reduced funding, leading to the withdrawal of Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), c) transition of African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), iv) Ongoing military operations, and v) ) challenges associated with access and security.

Mr. Mohamed summarised Somalia's updated work plan (attached). Mr. Mohamed indicated that implementation of the workplan would cost an estimated US \$23 million and that only US \$6.2 million had been secured to date to fund operations in 2023.

Mr. Mohamed closed by reiterating Somalia's commitment to strengthen cooperation with both existing and new partners, and encouraged those present to engage with Somalia in pursuit of achieving a mine free Somalia. Mr. Mohamed highlighted the high level of national ownership and institutional capacity present in the country and called for support to enhance the capacity of its national mine action institutions, as outlined in its Article 5 updated work plan.

**The HALO Trust** indicated that many of the mined areas in Somalia were laid to prevent military vehicles from crossing from Ethiopia into Somalia and that many of the mined areas contain mixed contamination of both anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. The HALO Trust further indicated that, a total of 7 square kilometres is estimated to be contaminated (see attached presentation).

The HALO Trust noted that many communities face risks not just from landmines but also from unexploded and abandoned explosive ordnance. The HALO Trust further provided information on the current capacity active in Somalia including 26 mobile demining teams, 20 explosive ordnance disposal teams, which have located and destroyed over 13,000 items of explosive ordnance across 5 States of Somalia, and 24, risk education teams deployed by the HALO Trust and UNMAS that operate across a much broader area of Somalia in response to call outs from communities.

The HALO Trust provided an update on their current capacity of 391 local staff. The HALO Trust noted that it continues to promote gender mainstreaming with approximately 1/5 of their staff being women working in both operational and support roles, including as members of mobile and liaison teams. The HALO Trust further indicated that female staff in Somalia do not face the same geographic restrictions as male staff members and are allowed to travel between clan boundary areas. The HALO also highlighted that it has implemented policies over the past years to improve recruitment and retention of female staff, including through the provision of generous birth-related leave and childcare support, including stipends to support working mothers.

The HALO Trust also provided an update on clearance outputs over the previous 8 years, indicating that, despite working in a difficult dynamic operating environment, it has addressed more than 3,000,000 square metres of land through manual mine clearance activities with a total of 124,000 beneficiaries.

The HALO Trust further explained that the low number of mines found and destroyed is due to operational restrictions and the low density of mines in large areas. The Halo Trust indicated that, as reported in the updated work plan, 1,114, hazardous areas remain to be addressed. However, non-

technical survey (NTS) in accessible areas remains a key priority to acquire a better understanding of the remaining challenge.

The HALO Trust further highlighted its capacity development support SEMA at both the Federal and State levels over the last three years conducted with the support of the Governments of the United Kingdom and Japan through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

The importance of information management was also highlighted including the support from the important support from the Government of Japan through UNMAS, which as enabled HALO to work with SEMA on the updating of the national information management and geographical information systems (IMSMA Core). This work is set to continue with further initiatives to build capacity in information management, as well as in quality assurance, operational management, including prioritisation and tasking, with particular focus on new tasks that have been identified through the recent NTS.

The importance of formal recognition of SEMA within the Government institution was highlighted in order to ensure the allocation of funding from the Federal Government of Somalia for both Federal and State SEMA offices. The importance of ensuring that mine action was integrated into the National development Plan was also highlighted.

HALO indicated that security is improving in South Central Somalia and that ATMIS and the Somali National Army have been making progress as part of Operation Black Line against Al Shabab. However, there remain large areas of the country which are still controlled by the organisation. HALO mentioned that as the security situation improves across Somalia, which is one of the key opportunities in Somalia right now, continued funding will allow NTS to be conducted in other States as part of the Somalia's updated workplan. HALO explained that it is well placed to support SEMA efforts look forward to continued or new funding in this area.

HALO also provided an update on the impact of recent nine-month conflict in Las Anod. As a result, joint teams from HALO and SEMA, as well as national and local security forces have identified several thousand items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) as well as abandoned ordnance (AO) which in some cases in order to ensure safety, are being moved, buried, or stockpiled by local communities. In response HALO is currently deploying EOD and community outreach risk education teams to the area and are hoping to increase this capacity in 2024 with the introduction of non-technical survey and clearance teams. As a result of the UXO and AO almost daily reports of children being injured, especially by smaller items of explosive ordnance, and Somalia's risk education response is an excellent example of how HALO and SEMA are both well placed to support national and State authorities in addressing situations such as these when they arise.

HALO mentioned that as its teams are recruited from the local population, local contexts are always considered, as well as the occupation of Shabab of these regions. HALO explained that in some cases smaller scale conflicts can occur, and this likelihood always has to be taken into consideration.

In response HALO explained that it works very closely with SEMA and with national, international authorities and security bodies and to mitigate any risks, potential threats as they arise.

HALO mentioned that international staff are able to make regular trips to Federal member States, as it underscores the ability of operators to work in what is typically seen as a very restrictive, and operationally challenging security environment.

HALO also mentioned the effects of climate change and especially recent flooding in Somalia, with heavier than usual rainfalls caused extensive flooding right away across Somalia and that this compounded existing displacement, and food security. This situation followed on from a long period of drought, with an estimated 8.2 million people now in need of humanitarian assistance, and of those an estimated 1.5 million are internally displaced.

HALO thanked Somalia's donors and for those States Parties who currently support the efforts of the Somali Government to meet the goals of the Convention to remove the threat of anti-personnel mines from Somalia.

In concluding, the HALO trust mentioned that security in many areas is stable, improving in others and as a few of these areas become accessible it is imperative that continued support, including as new donor funding, is provided to address the needs of the local communities.

### **Discussion**

**The GICHD** thanked the organisers of the event and remarked that the GICHD has worked closely with SEMA and its partners and that as part of its broad support to SEMA, it conducted a baseline capacity assessment in Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) in 2023 which will provide key findings and recommendations and will support the development of a detailed EORE action plan. The GICHD further mentioned that it continues supporting Somalia with its information management efforts and particularly with the upgrading of the system to IMSMA Core.

The GICHD also mentioned that in collaboration with SEMA it had recently launched the study, “Sustainable Development Outcomes of Mine Action in Somalia” during an event hosted by SEMA in Mogadishu in July 2023. The GICHD explained that the study was conducted as part of a joint UNDP-GICHD project entitled “Beyond Square Metres Cleared”, funded by Germany, which documents the multidimensional and transformative role of mine action in Somalia. Through the study, the authors were able to identify how mine action efforts have contributed directly to 15 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and 47 targets. The study outlines ways for the mine action sector to work in a more integrated manner to enable sustainable development, and to enhance more policy coherence to integrate mine action into national development plans and also into national development budgets. Furthermore, mine action in Somalia is also viewed as an important enabler of humanitarian, peace, and development efforts.

The study further identified small initiatives that leveraged great impacts on local communities and that the significant progress made in Somalia in terms addressing explosive ordnance contamination operates in an inclusive, sustainable, and effective manner. GICHD closed by reminding participants of the need for an increase and full international support to free the country from explosive hazards and the that the GICHD looks forward to supporting main action efforts in Somalia with the hope of achieving a collective.

**Japan** mentioned that as a member of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation Assistance it will convey the report of the meeting to colleagues in the relevant division of the Ministry and also to the Japanese Embassy in Mogadishu.

In addition to the support provided to The HALO Trust, Japan is also implementing a project in Somalia together with UNMAS, which is taking place in Galmudug, totalling approximately US \$1 million. This project includes deployment of 4 NTS teams, & 4 EORE Teams implemented by HALO

Trust in Galmudug. The project also includes capacity development for SEMA and a national mine action NGO based in Galmudug, including financial support to 6x SEMA Office in HQ and regions to organize coordination meetings, travel to international meetings, incentives and office running costs.

The Japanese representative explained that they are very familiar with the situation in Somalia and that international cooperation is an urgent priority, explaining that Somalia requires urgent mine risk education for internally displaced persons. Japan noted that the situation is not easy and encouraged SEMA to keep sharing relevant information with international embassies so that funding may be forthcoming in the future for a mine free Somalia.

**Mr. Dahir** thanked the GICHD and Japan for their intervention and for their support. Mr. Dahir noted that in order to achieve a mine-free Somalia it was very important for mine action activities to ensure strong cooperation between international organisations, donors and country institutions receiving support. Mr. Dahir thanked Japan for their advice and the indicated the intention of SEMA to continue communicating effectively with its partners in the hope for Somalia to be free of landmines.

**The ICBL** thanked the SEMA and the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance for organising the event. The ICBL noted its appreciation for the Updated Work Plan submitted by Somalia and the challenges faced by Somalia in fulfilling its Article 5 obligations. The ICBL highlighted the importance of Somalia prioritizing NTS to acquire a more accurate estimate of its contamination in areas that are safe and accessible. The ICBL noted the importance of Somalia's focus on risk education as this represents one of the few measures that can be taken to protect people from the threat of landmines, especially in situations where clearance is not imminent. The ICBL encouraged donors and Somalia's partners to provide the cooperation required for Somalia to cross the finish line by its 2027 deadline and that the ICBL is open to discuss ways it can support in these efforts.

**Mr. Abdulkadir** thanked the ICBL for support and noted that the NTS has already been completed in one State, (Puntland) and that Somalia is now conducting NTS in Galmudug State that is projected to be completed in the upcoming year. Mr. Abdulkadir highlighted the need for SEMA to secure funding to conduct NTS in remaining States of Somalia.

**The European Union (EU)** thanked SEMA and the HALO Trust for the comprehensive presentations. The EU explained that it supports Somalia in mine action and congratulated Somalia for the effort in implementing the Convention. The EU further highlighted that the EU looks forward to exploring opportunities for further cooperation.

**Thailand**, as Chair of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance, noted the effort Somalia is taking to engage with all partners as well as Somalia's efforts to link mine action with development and also Somalia's efforts to synergise its victim assistance efforts with the Convention on the Rights of Person's with Disabilities

**Mr. Dahir (SEMA)** explained that all mine action pillars are important, especially, victim assistance. Mr. Dahir mentioned that Somalia had developed an Action Plan for victim assistance in Somalia and that implementation has been challenged due to lack of funding. Mr. Dahir also mentioned that SEMA is cooperating with the Ministry of Women and that it is estimated that 15% of the Somalia population is disabled.

**The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)** requested further information on the potential impact on the planned withdrawal of the ATMIS. UNMAS also asked that, while the current conflict remains unpredictable, with changes in access, how does SEMA intend to implement its obligations? UNMAS also sought information on displacement caused by floods, drought, and conflict and on how Somalia is ensuring that it is prepared to deliver emergency risk education teams to respond quickly to protect displaced populations.

**Mr. Dahir (SEMA)** noted that in terms of risk education, given the role of improvised explosive devices and the current situation in the country where populations are on the move, SEMA and its partners are deploying risk education 'talking' devices, (the Risk Education Talking Device (RETD) is a portable, low-technology, solar-powered hand-held device on which EORE audio messages are recorded in the local language and distributed to impacted communities, one family is given one device to listen and to repeat recorded message and share among the kids in the family) . Mr. Dahir mentioned the positive response from the community on the use of 'talking' devices to provide information on the avoidance of explosive ordnance, and that the messages are provided in different languages. Mr. Dahir gave the floor to Mr. Hussein of UNMAS Somalia to provide a response on the first question.

**Mr. Hussein (UNMAS)** UNMAS mentioned that in relation to the withdrawal of ATMIS in Somalia, the withdrawal will have an impact and that the Government of Somalia along with international partners has agreed to a deadline for security handover from ATMIS to the Government of Somalia by December 2024. UNMAS further explained that there is an ongoing condition-based withdrawal of ATMIS and the last budget to aid the withdraw had been postponed for three months on the request of the Government of Somalia. UNMAS further noted that there will be technical assessments undertaken by the African Union and the Federal Government of Somalia to look into the viability of withdrawal.

UNMAS noted that agencies are slowly accessing previously insecure and inaccessible areas and highlighted the dangers of improvised explosive devices and explosive ordnance left behind by the conflict in these locations and the importance of emergency risk Education. For example, , in one local area of the country the situation changed overnight, and people started to immediately return to their houses. UNMAS explained that by the time people started returning, reports of accidents, especially of children, emerged. In response, SEMA, the HALO Trust, UNMAS together with other protection cluster partners provided trainings for first responders from local partners who have access and resources to operate in local communities. UNMAS also noted that SEMA and the HALO Trust have access to the location to conduct an assessment of contamination.

### **Summary and follow up.**

**Mr. Abdullahi Yusuf Farah, Director of the Political and Legal Department, Ministry of Internal Security** provided closing remarks. Mr. Farah thanked all participants for responding to Somalia's invitation to attend the event. Mr. Farah noted that in Somalia there have been various protracted conflicts for decades that have left behind explosives remnants of war and landmines risking the lives of the civilian population and obstructing peace, development, and the recovery of the country.

Mr. Farah mentioned that Somalia has a national plan to implement its obligations and address the challenges and commended all those who expressed empathy about the situation of landmine contamination in Somalia, thanking the constructive ideas of GICHD, Japan, ICBL, UNMAS and the

European Union as well as other participants. Mr. Farah urged all participants to focus on accelerating the elimination of landmines which requires commitment and effective cooperation and encouraged all to work closely with the SEMA which represents Somalia when it comes to national mine clearance program and coordination of the response to explosive hazards in the country. Mr. Farah extended a sincere welcome to those organisations that are willing to work with Somalia to achieve its objectives by 2027. Mr. Farah concluded by thanking donor countries for supporting the Somalia mine action program and implementing partners for their cooperation and continued support.

In closing, **Thailand took the floor** to provide an overview of the way forward, including continued engagement by the Committee with Somalia over the coming year and the distribution of a summary report to all participants and encouraged participants to continue their input and engagement with Somalia regarding the implementation of its obligations under the Convention.

For further information on the Mine Action Program in Somalia please direct all queries to: **Mr. Dahir Abdurahman Abdulle, Director General, Somalia Explosive Management Authority**, email: [dahiru@sema.org.so](mailto:dahiru@sema.org.so)