

OAS Statement on Improvised Anti-Personnel Mines

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues,

The OAS would like to take this opportunity to highlight the impact of improvised mines in the Americas. The use of anti-personnel (AP) mines of an improvised nature is the main focus of humanitarian clearance operations in Colombia, and they are a concern that transcends borders in the region, due to the movements of Non-State Actors.

As has been noted by various State Party representatives here today, these devices pose particular operational challenges due to their varied and ever-evolving construction. Colombia has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most mine-affected countries in the world, due to the presence of mines of an improvised nature. In such a context, the challenges related to dealing with improvised AP mines are faced by all humanitarian demining operators in the country.

Because the laying of improvised mines by non-state armed actors is very frequently carried out inconsistently, sometimes over large areas, in the Colombian context, this uncertainty has resulted in challenges to accurately identify the boundaries of hazardous areas through Non-technical Survey. Demining operators have a tendency to either clear additional area on the one hand, or to clear areas that prove not to be affected on the other due to inadequate information..

Moreover, locating these devices within the context of clearance operations can bring additional risks to operators, in particular due to the variable quantity of metal that is used to fabricate them. Metal content can be significant – where batteries or metal containers are used – but in exceptional cases can also be non-existent, which precludes the use of metal detectors and requires full excavation. Explosive content can also be far superior to that in conventionally-manufacture mines. In this context, appropriate operational procedures can be difficult to determine.

Notably, many improvised mines in Colombia function with the use of battery power, which has a limited lifespan – often within 2 years. Nevertheless, explosive content can still be viable much longer, depending on its composition.

We encourage States Parties to support research initiatives related how these devices are ageing, with a view to targeting prioritization efforts that prevent new victims. The definition of more precise national criteria for All Reasonable Effort in each national context is also a key area of importance.

The progress achieved by this convention in eliminating new production of anti-personnel mines in the formal sector, is notable, however, improvised AP mines continue to be produced in large quantities by non-state actors and this threat must also be actively addressed.

Thank you.