

-----CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY-----

Statement by Ms Greta Zeender
Head of External Relations, Policy and Cooperation Programmes, GICHD

“Clearing mined areas and mine risk education and reduction”

Fifth Review Conference of the APMBC
Siem Reap, Cambodia, 25-29 November 2024

Thank you, Mr. President,

In today’s volatile and evolving conflict landscape, mine action faces unprecedented challenges that require reassessing and adapting our approaches and strategies. Conflicts are increasingly complex and protracted, involving state and non-state actors. In 2023 alone, 59 state-based armed conflicts were recorded in 34 countries – a record number in a decade of increasing conflicts. Half of the mine-affected states are embroiled in active conflicts today. In densely populated areas, civilians account for up to 90% of casualties from explosive weapons, including increasing numbers of women and children.

Three specific challenges directly impact our work:

1. The **increasing role of non-state armed groups** complicates mine action efforts, often creating issues of safety and access. These actors frequently deploy improvised explosive devices (IEDs), also in urban contexts, resulting in complex contamination scenarios that challenge clearance and risk education. The rise in victim-activated IEDs underscores the need for urgent responses.
2. Landmine use by States not party to the APMBC; the growing use of improvised mines by non-state armed groups; and the occasional resurfacing of the perspective that anti-personnel mines are a legitimate means of warfare with military value indicate that **a challenge to the fundamental norm against the use of landmines** may be at play.
3. Many donors cautiously favour traditional over more dynamic funding models, limiting the sector’s capacity to respond to emerging threats and adapt flexibly. Moreover, funding allocations often follow new emergencies that capture the headlines. Overall, **prevailing funding patterns fail to support mine action sustainably and predictably**, especially in protracted conflict zones.

The GICHD is confident that the path forward lies in adaptability, innovation, and localization. In particular, the sector should invest in the following courses of action at the same time:

First, **we must strengthen implementation of the APMBC and other relevant instruments, and continue promoting the norm against the use, production and transfer of antipersonnel landmines.** We must leverage the good practices, methods, and approaches that we have developed and refined in decades of experience as the foundations for efficient, effective and safe operations. This includes better understanding the evolving modus operandi of armed groups, and how mine action should factor this in, as well as recognising the importance of inclusive operations as civilian populations are increasingly affected. A comprehensive mapping of international law obligations relevant to mine action would also prove beneficial, to identify possible gaps and ensure a coherent and integrated approach.

Second, **we must embrace innovative solutions and funding models.** We must look beyond traditional technological innovation and seek to adopt new processes, partnerships, and financing mechanisms. The immunization sector's front-loading model serves as an instructive example, allowing for immediate, flexible funding with a long-term vision. Similarly, the shift from traditional aid to credit-based models could provide sustainable, reliable funding solutions.

Third, **we must leverage fully the connections between mine action and broader humanitarian, development and peace efforts.** Through several case studies the GICHD, together with key partners, has showed the medium and long-term impact of mine action on sustainable development and explored the contribution of mine action to gender equality and women's empowerment. These links, acknowledged in the draft Siem Reap Action Plan, should be leveraged to enable sustained resourcing of mine action efforts beyond traditional sources, identify synergies and promote cooperation with other sectors. We should continue to collect evidence on the tangible benefits of mine action on economic growth, stability, gender equality, and social development to attract a wider base of stakeholders and secure investment from diverse sectors.

Finally, **we must do more to foster localization and national ownership.** Sustainable mine action must prioritize national ownership and local capacity enhancement. This includes nurturing stronger partnerships with national and local organizations, ensuring they have direct funding access, and empowering them with the resources necessary to lead clearance and risk education in an inclusive manner. Localization, in particular, is not just a rhetorical commitment but an actionable priority that requires concrete steps toward decentralizing operations and investing in local competencies. In fragile contexts such as Afghanistan, direct funding to local actors is vital to overcome operational barriers and securing long-term impact.



The future of mine action depends on our collective ability to adapt, innovate, and build resilience within our systems and frameworks. It is incumbent upon us to build a sector that is not only reactive but anticipatory, capable of addressing the shifting dynamics of modern conflict. The GICHD calls upon all stakeholders to join in this transformation, fostering a collaborative environment where adaptability, innovation, and localization drive meaningful progress benefitting everyone affected by landmines.

Thank you