

Intervention by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) at the Annual Pledging Conference of the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention

12 March 2025

Thank you Mme President.

This has been a useful meeting, and we are pleased to hear the many pledges of support for the vital work of the ISU and their statements of continued commitment to the convention. But advancement of the convention's goals does not take place in a vacuum, and today we are facing a number of major, **unprecedented challenges** to the Convention that we feel warrant discussion today to place our collective work in context.

First, since the start of Russia's war on Ukraine, **we have been witnessing the large-scale use of antipersonnel mines at a level not seen in decades, mainly by Russia's use in Ukraine, but also in Myanmar, as well as Iran and North Korea.** The impact on civilians in Ukraine and Myanmar is already devastating, and past experience shows that civilian casualties are likely to rise significantly when people return home after the conflicts end. The direct, brutal impact on people's lives will sadly continue over the decades it will take to clear the land. In Ukraine, it is Russia that is clearly responsible for this massive and inexcusable contamination, and we condemn their use in the strongest possible terms. We are also deeply concerned about the transfer of AP mines from the US to Ukraine late last year, possibly facilitating use by a State Party. **All use, by any actor, under any circumstances must be condemned and halted immediately, and we were heartened to hear that message repeated by some states today.**

The second major challenge is that **a small number of states bordering Russia are actively contemplating withdrawing from the Convention.** Such moves would not only put their own populations' lives in danger, but would also send the wrong signal at the worst possible time, aligning these countries with those who seek to weaken international norms, not those who defend them. We fully understand that the security landscape is shifting, especially across the transatlantic alliance. We understand and respect the need for strong defense measures, in particular in Europe. **But let's be very clear: not all weapons should be on the table. Some lines must never be crossed.** Just as the international community has long rejected the use of biological and chemical weapons, **it must also continue to reject antipersonnel mines.** These weapons are banned for the same reasons—they are inhumane, indiscriminate, cause disproportionate harm, and have devastating long-term consequences for civilians. Those who suggest a return to anti-personnel landmines as a legitimate defense measure are misinformed at best, reckless at worst.

We would like to take advantage of today's event to issue an urgent call to action. We call on every State Party, especially those with the closest ties to these countries, to stand loudly and clearly behind the convention, YOUR convention. We ask you to tell these countries in clear,

unwavering language that leaving this convention is a terrible idea that will only endanger their own populations. Remind these countries that **reaching for outdated, long-banned weapons does not project strength, but rather desperation and weakness**. Encourage them not to let **rational fear of their populations create irrational policy decisions that will have real and long-term repercussions for their people and for IHL more broadly**. To those contemplating withdrawal from the Convention—we ask you to **reconsider**. There are much safer and strategic ways to ensure the security of your populations than abandoning your international humanitarian commitments.

Finally, there is the devastating decision by the **United States to suspend or halt funding for most mine action programs worldwide and to delay payment of past unpaid costs**. As documented by the Landmine Monitor, the US is the world's largest mine action donor with a total contribution of \$310 million to 30 countries in 2023, or around 40% of all international support. Their generous and longstanding support over the years has saved countless of lives and enabled the release of thousands of square kilometers of land, paving the way for safer communities, long term recovery, development, and peace. A 40% cut to global mine action funding is a massive blow. Mine action operators have been scrambling to adapt to this sudden decision, but it has already led to the suspension or even termination of many clearance, risk education, and victim assistance programs, with countless communities endangered and thousands of jobs lost.

We have called on the US to quickly resume and maintain funding to this life-saving sector. Today we also call on other donors, big and small, to **step up, pitch in and fill the gap**. Clearly some donors are now planning to increase military budgets with potential implications for other budgets including mine action. But in preparing for potential conflict, states should keep at the forefront of their minds the aftermath of past conflicts. We need commitment to mine action, not cuts. We need solidarity, not retreat. In this context, rapid progress on a **voluntary trust fund** has become even more critical as a way to facilitate contributions from new and smaller donors. I'll come back to this point later via a joint statement.

Finally, to those countries in a position to provide international support, we ask you to be as generous as possible in these difficult times - for essential mine action operations, for the excellent and irreplaceable work of the Implementation Support Unit, but **also for research and advocacy conducted by civil society**. Advocacy, and the research that supports it, is a core element of mine action not only because we push for maximum progress on clearance and victim assistance, but because we fight every day to ensure **no new mines are put into the ground**. We have always been at the heart of this movement, acting as pioneer, watchdog, and cheerleader to ensure this treaty is more than just words on paper. We bring the voices of affected communities to this forum and work hard to create conditions for progress on the ground.

In conclusion, we built this treaty together, and we must protect it together. Today more than ever we need the sense of community, common purpose, and determination that has characterized the convention's work for over 25 years. We must all ensure the convention's implementation and universalization continues to move forward and challenges do not lead to permanent steps backwards.

With your permission, Mme President, I'd now like to read a short complementary joint statement on these challenges from the following group of mine action operators and other advocates: APOPO, the Colombian Campaign, DCA, HALO, HI ICBL, Mines Action Canada, MAG, MAR, and NPA.

Effective humanitarian mine action contributes to security for all. This means that the implementation of this treaty doesn't only achieve humanitarian objectives, but also strengthens security interests of donor and affected countries alike.

We must defend humanitarian treaties that have outlawed weapons that cause indiscriminate and unacceptable harm. Compliance with, and implementation of the APMBC saves lives and limbs and contributes to social and economic development, peace and security.

In light of the funding challenges the sector is facing, State Parties and donors should maintain support for mine action and treaty implementation now more than ever. More priority must also be given to policy and advocacy efforts.

The establishment of the Voluntary Trust Fund aimed at supporting Article 5 obligations under this Convention is more pressing now than ever. We have to expand the donor pool and allow smaller donors to contribute as much as possible to a joint resource aimed at ensuring affected States Parties struggling to secure bilateral funding are not left behind and this treaty can survive in a time of crisis. We therefore strongly urge states parties to speed up the timeline of the feasibility study, adjusting it to the reality of the funding situation the sector faces. We suggest states strive to present the preliminary findings of the study at the intersessionals and the final findings at the 22MSP this November. We would like to see a decision taken on the establishment of the fund at the 22MSP and for a fund to be set up by 23MSP. We have no time to lose, and this is our opportunity to ensure that Article 5, as a core article of this treaty, is appropriately supported in a timely manner. We as operators and civil society stand at the disposal of the working group to provide inputs and support the process however best possible.

Thank you.