



United Nations Mine Action Service
2019 Meeting of Experts of the High Contracting Parties to Protocol V
23 August 2019

Ms. President¹,

At the outset let me thank you for your leadership and determination to take forward the implementation of Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War. You can count on the support of the United Nations Mine Action Service.

Excellencies,

Twelve years after the Protocol entered into force, civilians across the world continue to suffer from explosive remnants of war (or ERW) that hamper humanitarian delivery and early recovery. Data collected by the United Nations Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism shows that the total number of ERW casualties increased by 37 per cent between 2017 and 2018 among the 21 countries monitored.² This alarming trend is not going in the right direction.

¹ H.E. Terhi Hakala, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations Office at Geneva, President-designate of Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War.

² Report of the 8th Round of Data, M&E Mechanism of the UN Strategy for Mine Action 2013 – 2018, United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action. 21 countries with UN Mine Action presence participated in the data collection.

On the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, thousands of children continue to be killed or injured by ERW. Last year in Afghanistan, children accounted for 87 per cent of civilian casualties from ERW.³ Children orphaned by ERW become more vulnerable to other abuses. Harm to children from ERW is often compounded by the lack of assistance for care, rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration, as stipulated by Article 8.

Deliberate or indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as clinics and hospitals, reduce access to lifesaving care. In the Syrian Arab Republic, where 50 per cent of healthcare centers have reportedly been destroyed or damaged, it is extremely difficult for explosive ordnance victims to access trauma surgery and follow-up medical care.

The situation is exacerbated by the increasingly protracted nature of conflicts, the use of heavy weaponry in urban areas, limited humanitarian access to dangerous areas, insufficient resources for and prioritization of mine action. The United Nations Secretary-General has called on parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and “will support the efforts of Member States to develop a political declaration, as well as appropriate limitations, common standards and operational policies in conformity with international humanitarian law relating to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.”⁴

³ United Nations Secretary-General Report, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, March 2019.

⁴ United Nations Secretary-General; Agenda for Disarmament: Securing Our Common Future; May 2018.

When we have resources, mine action makes a difference. In Mali, UNMAS coordinates clearance and risk education activities to reduce the impact of ERW on civilians. In just four months, from January to April 2019, our teams surveyed 48 villages and destroyed more than 1,000 ERW. In addition, UNMAS, UNICEF, and their partners delivered nearly 2,000 risk education sessions, reaching over 36,000 beneficiaries including approximately 8,000 women and 10,000 girls. We are pleased to note that a steady reduction of ERW victims has been recorded since 2015.

In Afghanistan, UNMAS responded to an urgent request of the Ministry of Education to clear ERW contamination in and around the Girls Central High School of Almar district in Faryab in December 2018. As a result, students were able to attend school and to take their exams. For the first time in the 30-year history of humanitarian mine action in Afghanistan, women began landmine clearance operations on 1 June 2018. Fourteen women were trained on non-technical survey and demining techniques. They released 51,520 square meters of mine/ERW affected land back to their community in Bamyan province.

In Libya, more than 588,000 ERW have been cleared since 2011. According to the Libyan Mine Action Centre, more than 245,000 Libyans have received risk education since 2016, including over 94,000 girls and 19,000 women, helping them to live more safely with the threat of ERW.

In the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), UNMAS cleared a primary school from ERW and kicked off the *Safe Ground* campaign in the DRC with a football match between the fifth- and sixth-year students on 20 June 2019. Mine Action is key to putting children back in safe schools in many villages of the DRC where hundreds of schools have been attacked or occupied by armed groups.

Excellencies,

Article 4 is a key provision of Protocol V. During the negotiations it was thought to have the greatest potential for protecting civilians.

Indeed, the transmission of the recorded and retained information on the use and abandonment of explosive ordnance enables us to design efficient and cost-effective responses, and to improve the safety of peacekeepers and humanitarian workers. Quality information on the location of target and strike areas, as well as the type of explosive ordnance used, should be released without delay after the cessation of hostilities, to the party in control of the affected area or a third party.

The effectiveness of this provision and of the Protocol can be undermined if High Contracting Parties do not have detailed procedures and training in place to implement Article 4 in case of an armed conflict. The United Nations calls on High Contracting Parties to fully implement Article 4, record and retain the information on the explosive ordnance used and transmit that information once the fighting has ended.

In a context marked by protracted conflicts and intense fighting resulting in widespread ERW contamination, UNMAS stands ready to continue receiving and using life-saving information in compliance with Article 4 to expedite the survey, marking and clearance of ERW.⁵

Thank you for your attention.

⁵ UNMAS has received information in the past on Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, and Palestine.