

## Statement by Ambassador Stefano Toscano, GICHD Director

### Fourth Review Conference – Clearing Mined Areas

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the twenty years since the Convention came in to force, much progress has been made, at the global level, in the way in which we collectively address the identification and removal of AP mine. Along the way, we have learned valuable lessons:

- ✓ through our political commitment and engagement, we have successfully stigmatized the use of these indiscriminate weapons;
- ✓ by setting ourselves a concrete target to clear all mined areas by 2025, we have maintained focused attention on the problem;
- ✓ and by mainstreaming gender and diversity at the strategic and operational levels we are ensuring that our interventions include and benefit all. In this context, let me highlight that last Monday 25 November was the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Please know that the GICHD has just published a Guidance on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse for the mine action sector. We would like to thank Canada for making this publication possible;
- ✓ Finally, at a technical level, we have managed to agree, establish and codify, through the International Mine Action Standards, operational methods and good practices guiding mine action operations.

The Land Release Process is a prime example of this. Five years ago, as we conveyed at the last Review Conference in Maputo, the sector had just recently updated and re-organised the IMAS series around Land Release. It is now the globally accepted framework that is applied during management of survey and clearance programmes. Still, it is not yet fully implemented across all mine action programmes, and many states lack the necessary confidence to cancel or reduce land through non-technical and technical survey.

The GICHD is therefore pleased to see that the Oslo Action Plan has recognised this problem and seeks to address it in Section V: “Survey and clearance of mined areas”. Through direct reference to IMAS-compliant reporting, commitments to evidence-based decisions States Parties are making it clear that they support the continued and universal use of Land Release as the way to go when addressing AP contamination and moving towards our 2025 goal.

The road ahead still isn’t easy, many affected states still face significant contamination stemming from past conflicts, and in recent years we have been faced with new challenges. The requirement to deploy field teams into often complex urban or peri-urban environments, in some cases in the immediate aftermath of conflict, and often tasking them to deal with increasingly complex types of contamination, such as mines of an improvised nature, is just one of the factors that is impacting on the way that field operations are managed.

Significant efforts have been made to update IMAS. Over the past two years the IMAS Review Board, for which GICHD serves as the secretariat and an active member, has worked tirelessly to ensure that the standards are adapted to adequately reflect some of the new challenges being encountered in the field. This exercise was completed earlier this year and a concerted effort now needs to be made to ensure that affected states update their national standards so that they are both; IMAS-compliant, and appropriate to the specific operating context.

The sharp increase in numbers of casualties in the last five years has been alarming and calls for a renewed focus on risk education. In this regard, allow me to again commend States Parties for strengthening their collective commitments towards the delivery of effective, relevant and targeted risk education in affected areas, that is adapted to the specific needs of different age and gender groups. The Oslo Action Plan in its Section VI indeed outlines several tangible actions that, when taken together and applied collectively, can help reverse this disturbing trend.

With a view to rising to this humanitarian challenge and preventing new casualties, an Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) Advisory Group was established in May 2019. The GICHD believes that risk education should play a strengthened role in mine action, and also be increasingly understood as a contribution to and part of the wider humanitarian and development sectors and will continue to support risk education efforts in a gender and diversity sensitive and responsive manner against this background.

At the heart of all these efforts is an underlying prerequisite; which is that mine action programmes need to be equipped with credible evidence upon which to base their decisions. Modern GIS-based information management tools have developed at pace that was hitherto unprecedented. The latest iteration of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA Core) is set to revolutionise the way in which national programmes can interact with and apply the data that they are collecting in the field.

The new IMAS guidance on minimum data requirements, currently in the latest stages of development, will provide strong foundation for information management, ensuring not only that reporting is facilitated in line with the provisions laid out in the Oslo Action Plan, but also that every national mine action programme is afforded the ability to set its data collection parameters across all five pillars.

Mr. President,

The survey and clearance of mined areas are often generously underwritten by international donors, and to achieve success it is essential that this support be maintained and where possible increased. That said, from the GICHDs perspective, perhaps the single most important factor for success is still national ownership of the issue. By empowering affected states to manage the problem themselves we ensure that the solutions provided by the international community are sustainable and relevant within the national context.

In recent years the sector has seen some success in this regard. For example, more and more affected states are taking on a leadership role in their own countries by developing and implementing

National Mine Action Strategies and completion workplans, recent examples include; Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sri Lanka, South Sudan and Zimbabwe. The development of these evidence-based national policy documents affords affected States the ability to set their own priorities for clearance, often based on national development plans that reach far beyond the mine action sector.

This is a positive trend, and one that we should seek to support.

In summary, we believe that the provisions on survey and clearance and risk education laid out in the Oslo Action Plan may represent a watershed moment for the sector. By putting in place positive, tangible actions, and committing to hold ones ourselves to them through measurable indicators, we have given ourselves the best chance to address all mined areas by 2025.

Thank you.