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**United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action
Twelfth Conference of High Contracting Parties to Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of
War**

Statement under General Exchange of Views

19 November 2018

Mr. President,¹

First of all, we would like to congratulate on your election and you can count on our full support and cooperation during this meeting.

The following statement is delivered on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.²

A few weeks ago, in the north-western province of Faryab in Afghanistan, a group of children between 5 and 12 years old were playing with their new-found toy. The mortar round, exploded killing eight children and wounding six others, two of whom lost limbs.

Sadly, this is not an isolated incident. In the first six months of 2018, 89% of all victims of explosive remnants of war (ERW) and victim-operated Improvised Explosive Devices in Afghanistan were children.³

¹ Mouayed Saleh, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations Office at Geneva, President-designate of the Twelfth Conference of High Contracting Parties to Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War.

² The United Nations Departments and Offices of the Secretariat, specialized agencies, funds and programmes are: the United Nations Mine Action Service of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the World Bank are observers.

³ United Nations Secretary-General; Report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security; A/73/374-S/2018/824; September 2018.



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Today, the effective implementation of Protocol V is as necessary as ever to end the civilian harm caused by the extensive contamination of ERW.

Excellencies,

The **urbanization of warfare** has led to a dramatic rise in civilian casualties, as well as the destruction and damage to critical civilian infrastructures. Even after hostilities have ceased, ERW continue to take a heavy toll on the civilian population, deny communities access to wells, schools, health infrastructure, and prevent the use of roads and bridges. They also impede the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Major cities of Iraq are heavily contaminated by ERW, much of which remains hidden in the rubble of destroyed buildings. Amidst tonnes of debris, and after more than a year of mine action operations, ERW along with other explosive devices, continue to be found in the streets, in buildings and other essential infrastructure. This year, from January to September, more than 16,200 ERW were removed in Ninewa and Anbar Governorates to enable the delivery of critical humanitarian and stabilizations activities. The experience in Iraq is an indication of what mine action operators will face in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere.

It is of the utmost importance that the international community has a clear understanding of the complexity of such operational environments.

Firstly, explosive devices are mixed with massive amounts of debris making **clearance operations in urban areas** extremely challenging. It must be stressed that mine action staff are operating in high risk environments with many other hazards including collapsed and unstable buildings, decomposing bodies, and toxic chemicals.

In addition to ensuring staff safety, the operations themselves are costly: search and clearance teams must be equipped with armoured plant machinery to sift through and remove the debris.



The **terms, standards, and measurements** that we once knew need to be revised to address the scale and nature of the threat. For example, assessing progress against the number of square meters cleared, applicable to ‘flat environments’, are unsuitable in a three-dimensional environment where search operations take place in multi-storey buildings.

Information management must also adapt. The sector needs accurate and fit-for-purpose information to support the national authorities to determine priorities and challenges, and establish clear and realistic outcomes.

In high risk and populated areas, such as in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine and Nigeria, **risk education** is often the only form of protection against explosive threats that civilians can be afforded. As contamination becomes more random, linking risk education to survey, clearance and victim assistance operations is critical for an effective response. Every child and every adult should receive a minimum amount of safety information to avoid the risks.

The United Nations commends the valuable work conducted by the Meeting of Experts on the obligation under **Article 8 Paragraph 2** to provide **assistance to victims** of ERW. The United Nations encourages all High Contracting Parties to implement the Plan of Action on Victim Assistance, as adopted by the Second Conference of the High Contracting Parties in 2008. The funding earmarked for Victim Assistance has decreased to 4% of global mine action funding in 2016.⁴ Responding to the needs of victims must become a greater priority for national and international actors – an investment in humanity.

The UN continues to advocate for this matter to be considered one of the priorities to prevent the loss of generation of civilians, in particular women and children. The United Nations, through its new mine action strategy, will strengthen its engagement on Victim Assistance, as a part of a UN larger goal to ‘leave no one behind’.

⁴ International Campaign to Ban Landmines; 2017 Landmine Monitor Report; December 2017.



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Excellencies,

In a context marked by protracted conflicts and intense fighting, the United Nations urges all parties involved to fully comply in a timely manner with **Article 4** on the recording, retaining, and transmission of information on the use and abandonment of ERWs. This provision is critical to the cost-effective planning and programming of mine action as well as for the safety of humanitarian assistance. Article 4 has so much potential to accelerate decontamination, protect civilians and save lives.

We would like to echo previous speakers' statements sharing the importance of taking appropriate measures to strengthen the management of their national ammunition stockpiles. Preventative measures are the most effective way of saving lives.

In our turbulent world, we must act to ensure that the Protocol V delivers on its humanitarian promises. The United Nations calls on States who have not joined the CCW and its Protocol V to do so urgently.

Thank you.