

**Statement by Ambassador Stefano Toscano,
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**Intersessional Meetings of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention
Opening Remarks, Geneva, 18 May 2016**

Madam President,

Let me first congratulate you on your Presidency. The successful First Pledging Conference for the implementation of the Ottawa Convention in early March is a testimony to your Presidency's clarity of purpose and vigor.

Clarity of purpose, vigor, and political and financial commitment by affected states, donor countries and the mine action sector are crucial ingredients to reach the targets set by the Maputo Declaration adopted two years ago.

The two following days provide an excellent opportunity to focus on concrete ways in which we can reach completion by 2025. How do we make the most of our actions during this "last stretch" - despite the persistent challenges along the way?

Let me highlight two points that, in our opinion, will play a substantial role in making a difference towards the 2025 goal:

- First, we need to achieve **greater clarity on the remaining challenge** and substantially **increase the efficiency** and pace with which land is released.

The land release methodology must be placed firmly at the centre of our activities. Some might say this is nothing new – but then why is it that there are still indications of land being cleared with no evidence supporting the need for clearance?

The Maputo Action Plan, specifically Action Point 9, underlines that Article 5 of the Convention is about releasing land. Clearance might be necessary to that end, and then it might not. Implementing the land release methodology will accelerate our work in that it will make it evidence-based. In this context, embracing technological innovations to improve survey activities will help considerably – think for example of the use of mobile technologies for data collection or the potential of Unmanned Aerial Systems for improved survey of inaccessible hazardous areas.

- Second, **building up national and local capacity** must remain a priority, and needs to be strengthened. Not least also with a view to enabling national authorities to deal with long-term residual contamination once completion is reached.

Crucial building blocks towards strengthened national and local capacity are increased coordination and cooperation at national level. National authorities, operators and donors need to coordinate their activities, align their targets and agree on priorities – under the leadership of the affected States.

Donor Coordination Workshops, such as the one held for Afghanistan recently, provide a useful tool to strengthen linkages between mine action stakeholders and provide a platform to exchange views on challenges and opportunities in a specific context.

The Maputo Declaration states that we have to *“[s]tay focused and spare no efforts until the main object and purpose of the Convention are fully materialized”*. Let us continue to be guided by that commitment.

Thank you