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Check Against Delivery

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOHN DUNCAN TO THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON MINE CLEARANCE, MINE RISK
EDUCATION AND MINE ACTION TECHNOLOGIES**

The only mined areas under the jurisdiction and control of the UK are located in the Falkland Islands. The UK has submitted a request for a 10 year extension of its deadline to fulfil its obligation to destroy all anti-personnel mines in the Falkland Islands. This is based on the findings of the Joint UK-Argentine Feasibility Study on the clearance of landmines in the Falkland Islands that was completed in October 2007 and reflects the complexities of de-mining in the Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islands residents were regularly consulted while the Feasibility Study was being carried out and any future decisions will be made in consultation with the Falkland Islands Government.

It was not possible to implement a national de-mining programme until the Feasibility Study was completed, because this required expert advice on estimated costs, resources and timescales involved which was the principal aim of the Feasibility Study. In 2001 a Joint UK-Argentine Working Party was established to take forward this task. As I said at the November 2007 Meeting of States Parties this was a "long and complex journey that that had to overcome

significant difficulties." We are grateful to the Argentine Government for the constructive joint work on the study. The UK is now actively considering the options for clearance that it set out.

There are 117 mined areas on the Falkland Islands, including 4 areas that are only suspected of containing mines. In total they cover just over 13 sq kms. The mined areas cover a wide range of terrain including sandy beaches and dunes, mountains, rock screes, dry peat, wet swampy peat, and pasture land. Some of these areas are very isolated and have no access tracks, even for 4 wheeled vehicles; these areas can only be accessed by specialist track vehicles at present. Our extension request describes the significant environmental, technical and geographical challenges that these mined areas present for any de-mining operation. The Field Survey, carried out by Cranfield University as part of the Feasibility Study, concluded that the clearance of mines from all mined areas would be challenging, but technically possible. It estimated that the task would take a minimum of 10 years, subject to the outcome of a trial.

Yesterday's presentations on victim assistance were a powerful reminder to us all that anti-personnel mines continue to injure and maim on a daily basis. In stark contrast to those mine-affected areas that we heard about, the humanitarian and social-economic impact of the mined areas in the Falkland Islands is negligible. There have never been any civilian injuries in almost 26 years. And the mined areas represent only 0.1% of land used for farming. Consequently there are no negative humanitarian or socio-economic implications if

the UK's extension were to be granted. Indeed, the Falkland Islanders have expressed concern about the negative socio-economic impact that a de-mining operation would have. A large-scale de-mining programme over an extended period of time will severely strain the infrastructure of their small community. The Feasibility Study also highlighted the serious environmental damage to the Islands fragile eco-system that any de-mining operation will have and the major remediation that will be required. The UK will have to, in consultation with the Falkland Islanders, carefully consider how to manage the possible negative environmental and socio-economic impact of a de-mining operation.

In the meantime, as stipulated in Article 5, all 117 areas have been perimeter-marked and are regularly monitored and protected by quality fencing, to ensure the effective exclusion of civilians. The active engagement of a UK Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) detachment during regular monitoring to intercept mines that may become a problem, reduces the hazards significantly and the possible impact on the community is continually reduced. Mine Risk Education for military and civilians on the island complements these efforts to minimise the threat posed by the mined areas.

Let there be no doubt that the UK takes all its obligations under the Ottawa Convention extremely seriously. With the 1998 Landmines Act we put into place effective domestic legislation to prevent and suppress any activities prohibited for a State Party taking place on territory under its jurisdiction and control. The UK destroyed its

substantial stockpile of over a million anti-personnel mines within the first year from entry into force of the Convention.

On signing the Convention the UK doubled its contribution to the costs of mine clearance operations around the world to 10 million pounds. We are proud of our record of providing international cooperation and assistance under Article 6. Our strong support in this area from the outset demonstrates the UK's firm commitment to the Convention. The UK's contribution to de-mining programmes in countries where anti-personnel mines are causing daily suffering and impeding development is helping to achieve the convention's underlying purpose: to put an end to the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines.