

UK STATEMENT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 5, CLEARANCE OF MINED AREAS

Mr President,

It is a tribute to the concerted efforts of Member States and Civil Society that this Convention has achieved so much in 11 years. Anti-personnel mines have become stigmatised and are used less now than at any other time in their history. More and more mines are being lifted from the ground and this activity is rightly focussed in areas where they present the highest humanitarian and developmental threat. The steady decline in casualties over the last decade means that collectively we can place a greater emphasis on delivering social and economic outcomes through Mine Action. The Cartagena Action Plan adopted last year re-energised States' efforts. The UK has responded by developing a comprehensive Mine Action Strategy supported by an investment of £30 million over the next 3 years designed to assist those countries where the threat to lives and livelihoods is greatest.

Mr President,

As the UK reported at the Intersessional meeting in June this year, we have successfully completed a 4-site demining pilot project in the Falkland Islands. The lessons learned from that project are shaping how future de-mining of the Falkland Islands could be carried out. I hope many of you were able to attend yesterday's lunchtime event presented by Robin Swanson who headed-up our Demining Project Office – the equivalent of a mine action centre; he was based in Port Stanley, in the Falkland Islands, for the duration of the project. Robin's presentation highlighted four key lessons from our experience:

1. The weather is always unpredictable in the Falkland Islands even in summer; the impact of this should not be underestimated;
2. The terrain is tough and unforgiving for both manual and mechanical de-mining;
3. Further research and development is necessary to manually detect minimum metal mines more easily; and
4. Where mines are laid in coastal sand, they will be found buried at much greater depths due to the build-up of sand over the years.

These factors made work particularly hazardous for the de-miners who were deployed to the Falkland Islands. Nevertheless, despite the sometimes appalling conditions they cleared 1,246 anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, 2 sub-munitions and 9 other explosive remnants of war over the course of 6 months continuous work.

The main technical problem was that of mine-detection. Most anti-personnel mines used on the Islands have minimum-metal content and they proved impossible to locate reliably with mine detectors at the depth specified in the contract. Ground penetrating radar systems were also ineffective and the use of dogs was dismissed early in the planning stage due to the high winds experienced on the Islands, which would whip away any scent of explosives. Because of concerns about the impact on the environment, the use of mechanical systems had been discouraged and this meant that full manual clearance was the only practical option. Consequently clearance took longer than anticipated. In the absence of new technologies to specifically address this issue manual clearance is likely to be the default technique in the future. Nevertheless, we shall explore the potential use of all alternatives at sites where the environmental damage can be mitigated.

It is important to note that we found the lack of any real, example mines for training and accreditation hampered the project. Example mines are important to allow de-miners to learn in a safe environment how best to tackle the threat they face. They are essential to test the capability of detection systems – and accredit them – before work starts. We have therefore kept a number of the mines found in Phase I to address this problem in future projects, they will of course be recorded in our annual returns. In addition, ~~and as announced yesterday,~~ Colin King's mine exploitation work and comprehensive report covering the 4 mine types located on the Falkland Islands will be an invaluable tool for subsequent clearance projects.

This report can be found on various mine ban convention websites and we hope colleagues will find it useful.

As is common elsewhere in the world, community involvement was essential to the success of the project. The clearance contractor, and the Demining Project Office, worked extremely hard to explain to the community the considerable care taken by de-miners from both Zimbabwe and the Lebanon to locate and then destroy the mines and other explosive remnants of war. In addition to regular local radio and newspaper articles and town hall meetings, the community was invited to observe the work being undertaken on a number of occasions and this proved critical in building confidence. We intend to continue to build on this confidence and community support.

Mr President,

On behalf of the United Kingdom I can announce today that we will be taking forward a further project in the Falkland Islands in 2011. Building on the success of our initial pilot project which cleared four minefields, we will now undertake a Land Release in Suspect Hazard Areas project. We anticipate that such a project will be significantly less invasive on the environment than full excavation work, it will potentially release significant swathes of land, and will give us the opportunity to determine which methods and tools are the most appropriate for locating the threat on different types of terrain. To release land back to the community in this way will be a further significant step for the UK in meeting its obligations under this Convention.

We have informed the Falkland Islands Government of our proposed project and are working with them on the precise details. A scoping visit to the Falkland Islands by officials and technical experts will take place in January next year. The procurement process will begin shortly after that, and Bidder visits to the Islands expected to take place in April. The project itself should start in October/November to make the most of the austral summer, and should last for around six months. We look forward to providing an update on progress to States Parties at the Intersessional meeting in June next year.

Mr President,

The UK recognises the importance of fulfilling our obligations under the Ottawa Convention. This project is an indication of our continued commitment to the Convention. But we must also balance these commitments against the need to ensure that we make the best use of our very limited funds – particularly in the current financial climate. The cost of mine clearance in the Falkland Islands is particularly high – primarily due to its remote location and challenging natural environment, but also because of the limited methods available for detection and safe clearance while ensuring minimal environmental impact. However, the mines that have been laid in the Falkland Islands pose a negligible humanitarian risk, and there are similarly negligible economic, and social impacts. For these reasons mine clearance in the Falkland Islands remains a low priority for the UK government.

Mr President

The UK is committed to Mine Action in countries where the need for clearance of landmines, cluster munitions and other ERW will contribute significantly to the lives of some of the world's poorest people. As we announced last month, through the Department for

International Development, the UK is committed to spending £30 million on mine action over the next 3 years. Country selection is based on criteria drawn from the Department for International Development's latest Mine Action strategy. Mine Action work is focussed on the countries where we can deliver the greatest positive change on the lives and livelihoods of those affected, particularly in terms of laying the groundwork for longer-term development. Whilst it would not be feasible for us to support significant clearance in every country affected by landmines, cluster munitions and Explosive Remnants of War, we have worked hard to ensure that our funding is targeted on those countries where it will deliver the greatest impact. We believe that this approach reflects the true spirit of the Convention.

Thank you Mr President.