

Annual Meeting of States Parties, Geneva, November/December 2015

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Statement on Clearance of Mined Areas

Mr President,

- As this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor, I wish to thank you for all the hard work that has been put into the organisation of this conference. I would also like to thank the Implementation Support Unit for their role in enabling our discussions. The United Kingdom remains committed to the work and goals of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.
- I thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the United Kingdom's actions to implement clearance of mined areas in the Falkland Islands. I wish to thank the Committee on the Implementation of Article 5 for their collegiate and collaborative approach. The United Kingdom remains committed to transparency with regards to its obligations under the Convention. Its understanding of the requirements of demining the Falkland Islands continues to evolve, and the United Kingdom will update the Committee as this process moves forward.
- As delegations will be aware, the Falkland Islands pose a unique challenge for demining operations. The remote location, adverse weather conditions, the environmental consequences of demining, capacity limits of the Islands to provide certain facilities for demining, for example, medical evacuation, incomplete Argentine minefield records and the tough financial climate are all factors the United Kingdom must contend with in taking forward this work. These factors will become increasingly more significant as the later phases of demining tackle the more remote and technically-challenging minefields.
- Despite these many challenges, we remain committed to meeting our obligations in relation to the Falkland Islands. Up to this point, three successful phases of work have taken place, including both clearance of mined areas and land release. A further fourth phase of demining will conclude by the end of March 2016. This phase

consists of two sub-phases: 4a and 4b. Phase 4a ran from January – May 2015 and successfully cleared 9 Suspected Hazardous Areas (SHAs). Phase 4b, which will clear a minimum of 16 more SHAs, is due to conclude by the end of March 2016. As a result, a significant area of land has also been released behind the Stanley Common Fence. This represents a significant step forward in meeting the United Kingdom's mine clearance obligations.

- In addition, we are also preparing for any future mine clearance operations by carrying out Technical Surveys in some areas. As part of Phase 4b, a limited Technical Survey of Yorke Bay will be completed. This scoping project will help the United Kingdom to understand better the resources needed to demine this environmentally sensitive area in the future.

Mr President,

- As I have already mentioned, the United Kingdom's understanding of the demining challenge posed by the Falkland Islands improves as its demining operations progress. During the current phase, we found an unexpectedly large number and pattern of mines in one area that did not match the mine records. I would like to emphasise that these additional mines are located within a previously fenced and marked Suspect Hazardous Area and so do not pose any additional risk to the local population. This new batch of mines has been given a unique designation of 50C for ease of clearance and reporting. We are currently discussing handling of this area with the current contractors.

Mr President,

- The fourth phase of demining operations is making good progress and the United Kingdom continues to review how it may address the many challenges posed by Falkland Islands demining as it seek to fulfil its Article 5 obligations. Additionally, the small humanitarian and socio-economic impact of the mined areas in the Falkland Islands decreases as the mined areas closest to population centres are cleared. Most of the remaining mined areas are in extremely remote locations, and pose negligible risk to civilians. As such, the United Kingdom considers the Falkland Islands to be

'mine-impact free'. The Suspect Hazardous Areas that will remain when Phase 4b concludes will pose no economic, developmental or social risk to the local population.

- Declaring the Falkland Islands 'mine impact free' does not affect the United Kingdom's commitment to fulfilling its legal obligation under the Convention. We continue to work with the Falklands Islands Government to decide the sequencing and timing of remaining minefields clearance and will continue to update the Committee as plans for future demining operations are finalised.

Thank you.