

**Statement of His Excellency Sam Sotha
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**Advisor to the Prime Minister, and
Secretary General of the Cambodian Mine Action and
Victim Assistance Authority - CMAA**

**At the 7MSP of the Convention on the Prohibition
of the Use, Stockpiling and Transfer
of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction.**

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Madame the President, first allow me to extend Cambodia's warmest congratulations to you on your election to the Presidency of the Seventh Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty. My delegation trusts that under your able leadership, this meeting will be productive and meaningful.

In mid 2000, the Government of Canada provided financial support to Cambodia to conduct a comprehensive National Level One Survey in order to measure the scope and the impact of mines and UXO on Cambodia. By the end of 2002 based on information received from L1S we have developed a long-term national mine action strategy and further developed a five year plan presented in Nairobi 2005-2009. The survey data shows that more than 4,400 sqkm. of Cambodia was contaminated with mines/UXO.

Through our three years experiences we observe that the suspected areas identified were often too large and poorly defined. In addition, there were mined areas that were not captured during the survey project, and therefore discovered by clearance operators afterward.

Madame President, regardless of the above mentioned weaknesses, the survey data was useful at the time allowing the Royal Government of Cambodia to appreciate the magnitude of the national mine contamination, for the development of a long-term national mine action strategy.

Recognizing Cambodia is a developing country we have to ensure utilizing limited resources to address an insurmountable problem but attain as soon as possible our ambitious goal towards zero victims in 2012. The Royal Government is now adopting on “ Area Reduction Policy” thus to consider a risk management approach that focuses on techniques for effectively releasing land in order that de-mining assets can be more effectively deployed to areas that have actually mined.

Madame the President, the very rapid internal migration of the population after conflict ceased has changed the settlement and use of land quite dramatically. Forest loss, especially in the north-west provinces, in the last few years has been extremely rapid and exceeds several hundred square kilometers. Consequently, the Level One Survey data has very quickly become out-of-date and no longer reflects the current mine situation in Cambodia.

Meanwhile the extent of land reclaimed by local people and new settlers is extremely large in the north-west provinces considered as heavily mined areas. As a result, it changes the status of current suspected mined areas which needs to be formally recorded. This information is vital for use by the Royal Government, the local authority and operators to improve the effectiveness of their mine clearance planning.

We will therefore update the contamination situation where the majority of suspected lands have been returned to productive use by locals and new settlers. There is no reason to maintain the current status of mine suspected lands which have been turned to productive use in the national mine contamination database. Currently the level of land reclaimed is already substantial and increasing constantly, as the local people and the new settlers will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Indeed there is a need for us to seek a practical and sustainable solution to update the national mine contamination database, so that mine clearance can be targeted on the areas posing the greatest risk to the local community.

We are now labeling a suspected area for instance to one hectare instead of one square kilometer (or 100 hectares) and the ratio of current operation was 10 to 20 mines per hectare. But what would it be if one could only find 10 to 20 mines in 100 hectares. In other words with the current effort operator could only charge demining 4,000 to 10,000 instead of 400,000 to 1,000,000 USD.

Our ultimate Goal from now to the next three years: To improve the effectiveness of mine clearance planning by targeting clearance efforts on areas posing the greatest risk to communities.

Let me give you the definition what I have presented: Reclaimed land is land that was previously classified as mine suspect, but has been returned to productive use by locals for three years without accident.

How we are going to do it?

1. There are a number of possible solutions for updating the national mine contamination database. One of the solutions is to re-conduct Level One Survey. However, this solution is not considered feasible because it will absorb significantly the already limited mine clearance resources and it cannot be the final solution. In addition, regular survey effort is required because land reclamation activity will continue on a large scale for many years to come, especially in the north-west provinces of the country.

2. Another possible solution is to record the reclaimed lands and use the information to update the national mine contamination database. This effort will require limited resources and is sustainable, and will involve interviewing people using the lands and checking the lands physically in order to collect relevant information.

3. Another solution is conducting technical survey on high risk villages to define the boundaries of mined areas and the level of threat, and as such the clearance priority for those villages. When the technical survey work is concluded at one village, the information obtained can be used to update the national mine contamination database as well. Technical discussions with CMAC regarding this process will be held at a later stage.

4. The information collected is entered into the database application developed by CMAA and shared with the CMAA as per request. If this is not applicable, hard copy reports are to be sent to the CMAA as requested. We have to closely coordinate and ensure effective implementation of this Area Reduction strategy.

The question posed before us here now is to what extent people of a given community accept the risk? Let me bring you back to the speech of the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan in Oslo on 3rd September 1997, I quote...“The presence—or even the fear of the presence --of just one landmine can prevent the cultivation of an entire field, robbing a family or perhaps an entire village of its livelihood.” These words remind us indeed that our decision is right to the point that people have no more fear while reclaiming their land.

Madame the President while I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all donors who still keep their confidence on our efforts, but I would like to remind this conference that the royal government has allocated annually approximately one million US dollars to de-mining plus with several millions US dollars to offset the tax import of equipment for de-mining for CMAC, HALO Trust, MAG, Royal Armed Forces and other de-mining organizations in the Kingdom.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.