

The Last Stretch for the APMBC ... How do we get the job done by 2025?

The question we have before us today is “What do we need to get the last stretch completed for full implementation of the Anti-Personnel (AP) Mine Ban Convention?”

When I first started working on this issue in 1998, we were, perhaps a bit naively, speaking of “Years not decades!” to fully implement the Mine Ban Convention. Now over a decade has passed and we are again aiming at the goal of years. We’re aiming at addressing State Party obligations by 2025, before another decade goes by.

So, can we do it? Can we finish the last stretch? And, what do we need to get the job done by 2025? Certainly simply talking is not the answer....

Is it technically possible? I believe it is. So what do we need?

From our perspective, there three main things that we need to move forward: 1) political will; 2) commit to using best practice to prevent wasting resources; and 3) and, sufficient available resources dedicated to the 2025 goal.

Political will is outside the realm of operators, such as DDG, so I leave that to the political arena to debate. Suffice to say, there is no point in wasting precious demining resources if the political will is not there to create the necessary conditions to carry out demining. This is both in terms of allowing operators to work in mine-affected states, but also in creating the necessary information availability, coordination, and legal conditions for this to happen.

In terms of using those scarce resources better, there have certainly been advances. But there has been no high tech “silver bullet”, as we might have hoped to find in 1997. And this has not been for lack of trying. A number of donors have put significant funding into searching for technological solutions that would work under the conditions we face in minefields. This **has** led to using what we have better, and making progress in realizing what **does not** work, but not in bringing in a brand new solution that has now been incorporated into our work. I believe that operators are generally using the tools we already had in our toolbox better and more efficiently, however.

We still generally clear land using teams of people, clearing manually. But we are now better at finding the areas we need to clear before we spend large amounts of money to place people on those tasks. We're trying to measure that efficiency and the impact we are having in mine affected countries more accurately. I think that has not only made us more cost effective, but also more effective generally in terms of making our work count in other ways that just counting mines that are removed. It has focused us on ensuring we make an impact on peoples' lives.

Key donors certainly still fund clearance organisations such as ourselves to the tune of millions of EUR annually. So, we know that support has not turned away from the sector. A caution, however, that new donor funding is often being identified in order to address current humanitarian emergencies. As a result, we have not seen a drop in funding for survey, clearance and risk education, but threats we are targeting are not primarily AP mines anymore, in the case of DDG. Explosive remnants from aerial bombings or ground fire, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are more frequently the targets in the recent humanitarian emergencies. Funding is being directed towards those emergency scenarios, and rightfully so, but this clearance will unfortunately not bring us forward towards meeting the 2025 deadline. To do so, we will need to have dedicated mine clearance funding that aims to clear the AP mines of past conflicts, as well as address explosive remnants from current conflicts. To be as effective as possible, this support needs to be multi-year and to the greatest extent possible coordinated so we are addressing any and all gaps.

We have to deal with these trade-offs all the time in humanitarian work. But the question is, "Can we justify dedicating funding to the goal of ridding the globe of AP mines?" Is it a wise use of resources?

I think it is. There is a concern that we will end up only clearing mines on mountain tops, or in marshes, where no one goes, or uses the land when we address Convention deadlines. The truth is, there are not many of those scenarios. While mines can be laid in these scenarios, the vast majority of mines are placed in areas that matter – whether those are border areas, strategically important ground, or to protect strong-holds and military bases. These areas often times become important areas for travel, agriculture or

residential areas later on, if not at the time of mine laying. Land use changes over time and the importance of these areas does as well.

In the case of Afghanistan, even though there are still some 500 square kilometres of potentially contaminated ground, we have been progressively reducing our work force over the last three years for lack of funding. And we are not the only ones, virtually all clearance organisations in Afghanistan have suffered in the same way. We have the political commitment, a trained work force and a scenario where areas cleared still have a considerable impact. Despite this, Afghanistan, and indeed the other major affected countries such as Angola, Sudan or Colombia may not be able to reach the 2025 deadline unless a more concerted effort is made for them to meet the targets.

Given this perennial shortage of resources, DDG feels that it has to make every square metre count. That's why we as an organization place so much emphasis on choosing the ground where clearance will have so much impact.

So, let's get to the point when the only mines left will be those on mountain tops and in areas impossible to travel. Let's do it as soon as we can before 2025, by putting the resources aside. There is both a humanitarian and an economic logic that makes this a wise investment, and not only one that is significant in the world of disarmament. If we do that, I believe we will have reached our goal, since the rest can be completed quickly afterwards.

So, can we do it by 2025? Yes, I believe it's possible. Do we need to work on ensuring there is closer partnership between those who are affected by mines, those who have the resources to help the problem and those who clear the mines? Yes, I believe we do. But better information exchange between the parties is not what will eat up mine clearance budgets. Events such as this that reinvigorate the momentum are an important step.

Thank you to H.E. Minister Riveros Marin for the chance to be here to contribute to this discussion, and for his impressive efforts to reinvigorate the momentum towards a total ban on AP mines.

Meeting the deadline in 2025 is possible. Let's make it years, not decades!