

Statement by Dr. Barbara Haering
President of the GICHD Council of Foundation

Seventeenth Meeting of States Parties the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention
Opening Ceremony, United Nations Office at Geneva, 26 November 2018

Madam President, Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by expressing our profound thanks to the Afghan Presidency for its commitment and for the quality of its work during this year. Ambassador Dalil, cooperating with you has been a pleasure, and we are looking forward to fruitful discussions throughout this week and to continuing our collaboration after your presidency.

Importance of the Convention

Over the past two decades, the GICHD has been supporting the implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention as well as other norms addressing explosive remnants of war. In our daily work, we experienced to what extent the Convention has become an important pillar of International Humanitarian Law, saving thousands of lives and significantly improving development prospects for many countries and communities. The Convention reflects a unique commitment of states supported by international organizations and NGOs. We have to maintain this strength – especially in times when International Law is under pressure. The International Mine Action Standards have proven to be of particular importance in view of implementing the Convention. The IMAS capture good practice and set the stage for efficient and effective operations on the ground. They are a unique feature in the world of disarmament and best practice themselves.

New Contamination

Four years after having set the benchmark of completion by 2025 at latest, new contamination and a sharp increase of the numbers of victims are of great concern for all of us. Addressing this challenge, operators on the ground are working close to or even in conflict zones with new forms of contamination also in urban environments. Moreover, they are facing weak or even not existing state institutions. In consequence, we are witnessing shrinking operational space for humanitarian action and increasing security threats for operators. Both is not acceptable. We must therefore work even harder on the main building blocks required for effective and efficient mine action namely:

1. Strong national ownership and commitment;
2. Sound strategic planning;
3. Application of the latest standards, methods and tools; and
4. Sufficient resources, both at the national and international level.

National strategies are crucial to align all actors engaged in mine action within a country. Let me highlight just one example: Since 2015, the GICHD has supported the Sri Lanka National Mine Action Centre in developing Sri Lanka's national mine action strategy 2016-2020. In April this year, we helped organize and facilitate the mid-term review, ensuring that the strategy remains relevant to the current context. This was particularly relevant in light of Sri Lanka's accession to the Convention last year.

Let me also underline the importance of the request by Ukraine for an extension of its deadline for destructing anti-personnel mines in mined areas. This is a crucial step for the work of the Convention and I wish to acknowledge the outstanding work done by the Presidency, the Committee on Article 5 implementation and the ISU in this regard. The GICHD supports Ukraine in developing a mine action law as well as national mine action standards and we are looking forward to continuing this cooperation.

New Strategy for the GICHD

Two weeks ago, the Council of Foundation launched the Centers strategy for the next four years. Having built up a robust result-based management during the last years the Center is now able to focus its whole strategy and its work on reducing risks and thus on maximizing outcome and impact of its contribution to humanitarian demining. In addition, gender and diversity will not only be a working principle but one of the core objectives of the center in the years to come – in an even closer cooperation with GMAP. At this point, it is important to recall to what extent mine action contributes to broader human security outcomes. In working together with our partners, we are connecting these agendas and addressing many of the overarching Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN.

On the eve of our 20th anniversary as a Center, I would like to thank all of you for your deep involvement and your support to mine action. Moreover, I would like to invite all of you to participate in our virtual reality experience “Home After War” set up downstairs. Step into the installation and be transported to Iraq. Listen to the story of a father returning with his family to Fallujah after the fall of ISIS, facing the fear of improvised explosive devices in their community and at home. This is a real story and it conveys the dangers left behind after war. These dangers are the reason why the fulfilment of obligations set by the convention remain at the core of our work.

Thank you.