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(virtual participation/remarks)
OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation Security Dialogue:
“Capacity Development in Humanitarian Mine Action”
Wednesday May 17, 2023; 1500 CET / 0900 EST

- Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to join this very important conversation. This is a timely and relevant topic, so I appreciate the opportunity to participate today.
- I want to start by highlighting that the United States is the global leader in landmine clearance and conventional weapons destruction. Since 1993, the United States has invested more than \$4.6 billion in clearing landmines and explosive remnants of war as well as strengthening our partners’ capacity to manage small arms, light weapons, and ammunition in more than 120 countries and areas.
- In 2022 alone, the United States provided over \$376 million to support conventional weapons destruction activities in more than 65 countries. Included in that total, are several OSCE countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine.
- Landmines, unexploded ordnance, and other explosive hazards have ripple effects that impact entire communities. Not only do they kill and maim innocent civilians, but they severely damage local communities, destroy livelihoods, and they contaminate productive land that could be used for infrastructure, education, farming, conservation, and other forms of economic development. These effects persist for decades, long after conflict has passed.

- Humanitarian mine action efforts have life-changing impacts for people across the globe, helping them to build a better and brighter future without the ever-present fear of injury or death.
- Looking beyond the individual beneficiaries, humanitarian mine action has a transformative effect on countries. It promotes food security by allowing more land to be farmed safely. It fosters economic development by opening land to new opportunities. It promotes stability, and allows people to move beyond a painful past and look forward to a more peaceful and prosperous future.
- This is what motivates the United States and many other countries to serve as humanitarian mine action donors – creating a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous world.
- For us, our humanitarian demining assistance approach involves two parallel lines of effort. First, we want to help address the most pressing threats as quickly as possible by funding demining NGOs, contractors, and others to clear explosive hazards threatening civilian populations. Second, and just as important, we want to set our partner governments up for success by helping them develop the capacity to deal with explosive hazards in the long term.
- This support is most effective when our partners have a well-established national mine action authority that can accredit operators, coordinate demining operations, and conduct effective quality assurance and effective operations. Additionally, a national capacity capable of conducting humanitarian demining operations independent of donor support is also critical.
- When we talk about building national capacity in humanitarian mine action, it is important to note that over the long term, mine action is most sustainable and effective when it is nationally owned and managed. Thus, it is essential that mine-impacted countries have the political will to devote funding to developing and sustaining national capacity.

- While donors can play a key role providing training and equipment for national authorities and government demining teams, sustained national funding is critical. As humanitarian demining priorities across the globe and donor funding levels remain fluid, the onus is ultimately on our partners to retain a capacity to respond to explosive hazards and keep their citizens safe.
- It is equally critical to ensure coordination and cooperation among donors as well as various sectors as they partner with national authorities. Humanitarian mine action falls at the nexus of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding. Clear communication among donors and implementing partners is required to avoid duplication of efforts and wasted resources. Well established national authorities are critical to ensuring this communication takes place effectively and that everyone involved in the mine action sector is well-coordinated.
- The U.S. prioritizes funding for critical clearance efforts including mine risk education/etc., but our goal is not to establish new humanitarian mine action NGOs that require donor funding to sustain their work. Rather, we prioritize strengthening partner governments' demining capacity and look to our partners to sustain the capacity we have helped build long after assistance has concluded.

Ukraine

- I'd like to turn now to the devastation and danger that Russia's brutal war of aggression has wrought in Ukraine as an example.
- Since the Kremlin launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022, the United States has committed more than \$91.5 million to help the Government of Ukraine address the urgent humanitarian challenges posed by explosive remnants of war.
- These explosive hazards are blocking access to farmland, slowing the distribution of humanitarian assistance, impeding reconstruction efforts, and preventing displaced people from returning to their homes, while continuing to kill and maim innocent civilians. The Government of Ukraine

estimates that 174,000 square kilometers of its territory may be contaminated – this is more than twice the size of Austria.

- This problem will, tragically, persist for a long time after Russia's unspeakable brutality ends. But the international community's attention to this issue, and Ukraine's prioritization of it, means we're on the right track. Our investment now will pay dividends long into the future and give the Ukrainian people another reason for continued hope.
- Prior to the 2022 invasion, the Department of State trained and equipped Ukraine's State Emergency Service demining teams that are now working tirelessly to address landmines and unexploded ordnance. Since the start of the war, we have provided explosive ordnance disposal equipment to Ukraine's demining authorities and are committed to providing continued assistance and capacity building well into the future.
- U.S. funding currently supports humanitarian demining teams and is training and equipping the Government of Ukraine's own humanitarian demining teams.
- Deploying U.S.-funded demining teams is essential to supplement Ukraine's existing national capacity to conduct area-wide surveys to locate explosive remnants of war, safely remove and destroy these hazards, and provide explosive ordnance risk education to returning civilian populations.
- U.S.-funded demining partners are already providing extensive explosive ordnance risk education to Ukrainians, both in person and via social media. While they have reached over 18 million people, this will unfortunately be an ongoing need for a long time to come.

Gender Mainstreaming in Humanitarian Mine Action

- Around the world, our implementing partners are ensuring women are included in all aspects of demining, from initial survey and landmine removal, to helping communities put the land to productive use after clearance.

- This is important because it requires consideration of the implications that any planned action has for both women and men. It helps ensure that women and men benefit equally, and it helps ensure that gender inequality is not perpetuated.
- Including women in peace and security positions is essential to the peace process, post-conflict reconstruction and meaningful reconciliation.
- Women bring a unique perspective to the table with solutions often rooted in strengthening community through inclusion and empowerment of all.

Conclusion

- Ensuring the safe return of displaced people and getting Ukraine's farmland back to productive use are priorities supported across the entire U.S. government.
- Our collective assistance is crucial to building a more safe, secure, and prosperous world. Thanks to strong bipartisan support from Congress, the Department of State looks forward to continuing this important work with other donor countries, those impacted by conflict, and the brave women and men who work in the field to secure at-risk weapons and ammunition and clear landmines and other explosive hazards.
- I'd like to invite everyone to explore the latest edition of our annual report *To Walk the Earth in Safety*, which is available online on the U.S. Department of State website, to see all the work the United States has accomplished in Ukraine and around the world.
- Thank you, Chair.