

GICHD UPDATE – MASG MEETING – 24 OCTOBER 2024

5th Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

The 5th Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention will be held in November 2024 in Cambodia. It will provide an opportunity for States Parties and all mine action stakeholders to take stock of what has been achieved under the Oslo Action Plan adopted in 2019, and what challenges remain. This conference is also an opportunity to remind the international community of the fundamental reasons why the Convention was adopted, in the hope of rekindling the momentum in favor of its full implementation. To this end, the States Parties will adopt three documents: (i) a review report highlighting progress made since the last review conference, (ii) a political declaration and (iii) a new action plan for the period 2025-2029.

The GICHD is fully committed to the preparation of this conference, in particular by contributing to the drafting of the above-mentioned review report and action plan. In parallel, the GICHD has also launched a series of briefing notes on topics central to the implementation of the Convention. Some of these are already available on the GICHD website, while others will be published over the coming weeks and up to the opening of the Conference. The aim of these notes is to present the challenges facing the sector and the best practices for overcoming them, to feed into ongoing discussions in the run-up to the Review Conference, and to raise awareness of the importance of the Convention and humanitarian demining among a wider audience.

Innovation in Mine Action

Innovation in the mine action sector and its coordination remains a key topic for the GICHD. Consequently, the EORR Innovation Hub has advanced through the consolidation of its concept, the establishment of the Innovation Technical Group (ITG) and the execution of the first editions of the Innovation Sessions, on the theme of Artificial Intelligence. The GICHD convened a preparatory meeting of the ITG in May 2024 to introduce the concept, discuss its potential scope and Terms of Reference (ToR). The meeting was conducted via video teleconference, with 63 participants representing National Mine Action Authorities (NMAA)/National Mine Action Centres (NMAC), international NGOs, academia, technology providers, equipment manufacturers, UN agencies as well as various governmental and private organisations. The final ToRs are expected to be approved in October 2024 and the Innovation Hub concept received very strong support from the community. A second ITG meeting will be held in early December to discuss the initial outline of the Mine Action Research Agenda (MARA) and contributions to shape the innovation-related events planned for 2025, such as the Innovation Award and the Innovation Conference in 2025 in Luxembourg.

The next step is the establishment of the Innovation Hub Strategic Committee, tasked with defining the long-term vision for research and innovation within the mine action sector. This committee will set overarching strategic goals and objectives, ensuring alignment with the global needs and priorities of the field. The work is ongoing, and it is anticipated that a multi-stakeholder group of 10-16 members would be ideal, comprising representatives from NMAs, national and international NGOs, academia, research and technology organizations, the UN and other international organisations, a non-mine

action research and innovation actors, and the international donor community. The GICHD would offer to co-chair the committee at its inception, alongside another stakeholder.

Afghanistan

The GICHD visited Afghanistan during September 10-13 and was hosted by UNAMA and UNMAS. The aim of this visit was to enhance the GICHD's understanding of the current mine action context in Afghanistan, including the current operating context, ways of working and current challenges faced by the Afghanistan mine action programme. Beyond meeting with UNAMA and UNMAS, the GICHD visited the Mine Action Technical Cell (MATC), which is funded by the UN and provides technical support to the MAPA as an independent entity, the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) and met with all Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) implementing partners.

Current challenges for the MAPA include but are not limited to: drastically reduced funding since 2021, which has led to a reduction in overall operational capacity and critical financial instability for the programme; high casualty rates (around 50 persons per month, with the majority of victims being children); a lack of understanding from the international community regarding the margin of maneuver for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. There are also however several opportunities: the best access for operations that the country has seen in years; an extreme willingness of the MAPA as a whole to engage with the international community to find solutions for support; the retention, albeit in a reduced capacity, of decades of mine action expertise.

Tentative plans for GICHD engagement in Afghanistan in 2025 include the following: renewing the GICHD donor conference for Afghanistan (which had been implemented prior to 2021) in prioritizing the participation of Afghan national implementing partners; support with implementing IMSMA Core; and eventual support regarding updating of national mine action standards and implementing relevant trainings.

GICHD support to Ukraine

GICHD support in Ukraine continued to focus on thematic priority areas for the Ukrainian government: (i) the development of Ukraine's first national mine action strategy, which provides a strategic framework for mine action in the country for a ten-year period and an implementation plan that covers the first three years, (ii) the development of national mine action standards, including land release, mechanical operations and detection systems involving animals, and (iii) the development of the country's mine action information management system.

At the same time, in June 2024 the GICHD organized, for the first time in Ukraine, a course for mine action managers aimed at senior officials working in various state institutions. In addition, the Center organized two "train-the-trainer courses" in quality management and non-technical survey, aimed at operational staff and delivered in the Ukrainian language. Finally, in August 2024 the GICHD facilitated a study visit by Ukrainian authorities to Bosnia-Herzegovina, focusing mainly on the governance of mine action programs and the monitoring of animal-based detection systems.

In March, the GICHD was invited to join the working group set up by the DFAE and the Ukrainian Ministry of Economy to organize the “Ukraine Mine Action Conference” in Lausanne on October 17-18, 2024. The aim of the conference is to address the critical importance of mine clearance as a central component of rebuilding society and the economy.