Mr Chair,

Firstly let me welcome your focus within this meeting on practical methods to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in clearance activities. Inefficient clearance leads to more individuals and communities being at risk from ERW for longer and ultimately slows States’ recovery from conflict. Improvements in efficiency and effectiveness of operations, however increase the impact of national initiatives and international assistance and should be encouraged wherever possible.

As an operational implementer, continually improving the efficiency and effectiveness of operations has been a consistent priority for MAG for over twenty years and it is an issue to which we continue to devote considerable time and effort.

At the core of work to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and impact in mine and ERW clearance operations is the principle that physical clearance of land should be undertaken only on areas that are actually contaminated. Undertaking default physical clearance of all suspected hazardous areas – which are usually significantly larger than the areas of actual contamination – is an inefficient use of resource. In recent years, the Humanitarian Mine Action community has devoted significant effort to the development of processes to refine and improve the collection of contamination data and, in parallel, use survey methodologies to release or cancel land. When effectively implemented, such Land Release methodologies can significantly increase the efficiency of clearance operations by focussing physical clearance on areas of actual contamination.

MAG believes that Land Release should form a part of mine and ERW clearance operations wherever possible. We acknowledge that there are specific national clearance contexts but encourage all States to incorporate and implement Land Release approaches within National Mine Action Standards. As a member of the review board for the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), MAG will continue to actively support the development of standard approaches to Land Release, and support efforts to ensure consistent operational reporting within the sector.

Efficiency and effectiveness can be significantly enhanced by the involvement of ERW-affected communities in operational planning, particularly in instances where there is little or no documented information on contamination locations. Community Liaison has been a central component of MAG’s operational approach for over fifteen years and it often provides critical information for effective survey and task prioritisation. The national Baseline Survey in Cambodia, undertaken by several operators with oversight from the Cambodia Mine Action Authority, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, is a recent example of a successful initiative at the national level to improve the integrity of contamination data and ensure that clearance activity is targeted on areas of actual contamination.
On a technical level, we strive to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our own operations through the implementation of integrated approaches to clearance and the development and deployment of new technologies and approaches. All aim to increase the rate at which contaminated areas can be released without compromising safety standards. In partnership with the Humanitarian Demining Program of the US Army’s Night Vision and Electronic Sensors Directorate, MAG conducts a global programme of Operational Field Evaluations of mechanical assets for use in ground preparation, technical survey and clearance. These initiatives aim to identify if, and if so how, when and where mechanical assets can be used to increase the efficiency of ERW clearance activities. Effective solutions have been found to address a number of operational challenges such as clearance in areas of high metal contamination or laterite soil, dense tropical vegetation and areas where ERW have migrated or degraded as a result of environmental conditions.

In Cambodia and Angola, MAG has incorporated the Handheld Standoff Mine Detection System (HSTAMIDS) into clearance operations and, in combination with Lateral Approach Methodology and Rapid Excavation Drills, has increased efficiency in mine clearance operations. We continue to trial models for the cost-effective integration of HSTAMIDS into HMA operations.

These are just some examples of how HMA operators can work with ERW-affected States, the international and ERW-affected communities and ERW-affected to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of clearance operations. IMAS and national standards must continually evolve to incorporate new approaches, techniques and assets and we respectfully encourage ERW-affected States to embrace new approaches and innovations whenever possible. MAG is grateful to the Australian Government, which is giving specific support for MAG to further improve impact, efficiency and effectiveness of mine and ERW clearance operations and share findings with HMA stakeholders.

Mr Chair,

We agree strongly that a coordinated approach between actors in the field is central to achieving efficient and effective ERW clearance operations. We are committed to ensuring that implementation of our clearance operations complements operations undertaken by other national and international agencies as well as other forms of technical assistance to ERW-affected States. We hope that last year’s international response to the conflict in Libya serves as an example of strong cooperation between implementing agencies, authorities and the United Nations Mine Action Team.

Finally, Mr Chair, MAG believes strongly that wherever ERW are removed, they must be also immediately destroyed in the interests of safety and security. We also believe that from a humanitarian and developmental perspective, ERW clearance operations are at their most efficient and effective when they are undertaken from the earliest possible moment after a conflict, when information is most recent and risks remain very high, and when they remove barriers to conflict recovery. We encourage States to prioritise and fund clearance in areas where it will reduce immediate and long-term risk to communities and facilitate socio-economic development initiatives at the local and national levels. In our experience, the involvement of ERW-affected communities in planning and prioritisation assists efforts to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in ERW-clearance programming, as do national ownership of ERW clearance operations and integration of activities with national development plans and strategies. In the spirit of open collaboration and joint learning in our sector, MAG plans to share our organisational approaches and reflections on measuring and assessing socio-economic and humanitarian impact within ERW clearance operations in the margins of the Twelfth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention in December this year.

I thank you Mr Chair.

Statement delivered by Chris Loughran
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