Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War

Cooperation and Assistance

Mr President

Australia takes this opportunity to thank the Coordinator for his work in progressing understanding of the cooperation and assistance obligations under Protocol V.

Australia fully recognises the devastating effects that explosive remnants of war (ERW) has on individuals and States, including the constraint on economic growth, particularly long after hostilities have ceased.

There is no doubt that cooperation and assistance to reduce the impact of ERW can be a precursor and enabler for peace, security, stability, humanitarian relief and development.

Mr President

At the core of Australia’s mine action strategy is our comprehensive approach to cooperation and assistance. It is very much focused on improving the quality of life for victims, reducing deaths and injuries and enhancing the capacity of countries to take ownership and manage their clearance and victim assistance activities.

It is in this spirit, that Australia continues to progress and advocate for the strengthening of commitment to coordination, cooperation and assistance through our strong network of integral partnerships including with affected States, international mine action groups, aid donors, UN implementing agencies (such as UNMAS), civil society and victims/people with disabilities.

Australia takes a comprehensive approach to mine action cooperation and assistance and focusses its efforts on the problem of ERW, regardless of whether the ERW is comprised of cluster munitions, landmines or other types of unexploded ordnance.

In that context, Australia is pleased to have provided over $100 million in mine action assistance to over 20 countries since 2010. A majority of this assistance, about $80 million, has been allocated to priority clearance and risk education activities, while a further 20 per cent of Australia’s funding, about $23 million, to victim assistance.

Mr President

In our region, Australia has continued to support and encourage work with Pacific Island States to advance initiatives to address the impacts of ERW – a dangerous and long-lasting legacy in the Pacific from World War II.

Over the last year Australia has supported two regional workshops aimed at assisting the Pacific region to develop and coordinate their responses to the challenges of
unexploded ordnance. The first workshop (held in Palau 24-26 October 2012) considered and proposed regional responses to the implementation of the Pacific Islands Forum Regional Unexploded Ordnance Strategy.

The second workshop (held in Brisbane 27-28 June 2013) advanced the outcomes from the Palau workshop and explored options to enhance the capacity of Pacific Islands Forum members in developing responses to manage the domestic threat of unexploded ordnance.

Australia contributed over $200,000 to assist Palau and the Pacific Islands Forum to hold these two workshops.

Addressing unexploded ordnance is also a priority issue for Australian aid to Palau. To support Palau, Australia is funding Cleared Ground Demining, a non-government organisation to remove unexploded ordnance, provide risk education and build Palau’s capacity to address unexploded ordnance. Australia’s estimated contribution to mine action in Palau is $4.5 million, between 2011 and 2015.

In 2013, Australia funded Cleared Ground Demining to undertake an unexploded ordnance assessment of three atolls in the Marshall Islands.

In recent years Australia has also funded a preliminary study into unexploded ordnance contamination in the Pacific as well as a study of unexploded ordnance contamination along the Kokoda trail in Papua New Guinea.

Australia has also been working to encourage more donors to become involved and cooperate in the Pacific and is coordinating its assistance with other donors active in the region.

Mr President

Australia’s support through the aid program is complemented by clearance work undertaken by the Australian Defence Force through OPERATION RENDER SAFE, involving clearance operations in the Pacific every two years. Operation RENDER SAFE will next take place in the Solomon Islands in November and December 2013.

The operation will be undertaken in cooperation with the Royal New Zealand Navy, United States Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy and will be supported by the Royal Solomon Island Police Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team. The following iteration of OPERATION RENDER SAFE will be held in Bougainville (Torokina), Papua New Guinea in 2014.

As an active member of the Pacific Islands Forum, Australia will continue to consider how it can best support the region to respond to the problem of ERW.
Mr President

Australia is mindful that our individual efforts will be more effective in achieving our common vision of minimising the risk, effects and occurrence of ERW if we work collectively in strong and closely coordinated partnerships with affected States, implementing agencies and other donors.

It was for this reason that Australia has chaired the Mine Action Support Group (MASG) and progressed work on how the MASG could improve coordination and partnerships and assist countries to complete their clearance challenges.

We take this opportunity to welcome and offer our full support to Japan as the incoming Chair of the MASG for 2014.

We also appreciate the Coordinator’s efforts to promote deeper coordination and cooperation by inviting donor countries to take part in the small group discussions with affected states during the Group of Experts meeting in April this year. Australia looks forward to continuing to work with States Parties, UN agencies, implementing partners, civil society and other donors to assist States in meeting their obligations under this Convention.

Mr President, I thank you.