



Statement

by

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**Wilton Park dialogue: Clearance of improvised explosive devices in the
Middle East**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we do not have to go out and convince people any longer that explosive remnants of war of any kind constitute a major impediment to post-conflict development. In this context it is irrelevant if we are talking about land mines, cluster munition remnants, projectiles of ordinary explosives or IED's. However, due to the changing characteristics of the conflicts in the Middle East with growing asymmetric warfare involving non-state actors, we have seen the emergence of a new phenomenon – the massive use and consecutive contamination with IED's. They constitute an especially treacherous form of weaponry not yet formally and explicitly addressed by international weapons conventions. Due to their mostly indiscriminate effects on fighters and civilians alike their use often collides with norms of IHL not only during but also notably after armed confrontations when civilian reconstruction is about to begin. Their variety makes clearance and destruction a particular challenge. Many professionals tasked to restitute land to civilian populations – military and civilian - have paid the highest price in order to help tackle

this issue. It is those silent heroes who we rely on in our daily work and whose contribution I

would like to remember in this context.

Germany has assisted the countries in the region for a long time when it comes to clearance of contaminated areas, drawing on its own rich experience after the end of the cold war. We are proud of the expertise of our military, civilian and commercial professionals who have specialized in this area and who have reached out to assist partners all over this world. We also have contributed with substantive financial as well as material support not only in terms of land clearance but also victims' assistance. So for instance in one of the most effected countries – Iraq - Germany has earmarked about 20 Mio € for clearance and victims' related issues of ERW in 2016/17 alone. Of this 17 Mio have been channeled to companies specialized in IED clearance and destruction which underlines the severity of the IED challenge.

But Germany is not only active in Iraq but also in the wider region as Afghanistan as well globally as for example in Colombia where land clearance is going to be big issue in the post-reconciliation process. Safe from remnants of war lands are one of the most important prerequisites and incentives for a peaceful and prosperous future.

But also a strong country like GER cannot do it alone and has to rely on effective international coordination and cooperation in this context. Notably the UN (through UNMAS) and the respective conventions existing under its umbrella – the CCW, APLMC and CCM have provided a functioning umbrella for bundling initiatives and providing tailor made and needs based assistance. Currently GER holds the presidency of the CCM, a convention which is dealing with a particularly indiscriminate weapon which has caused a lot of suffering within civilian populations – cluster munition.

When Germany took over the Presidency of the Convention on Cluster Munition in September 2016 we were pondering how to add value to the implementation of the convention in terms of lasting initiatives and concrete support. If we speak about the Convention on Cluster Munition and its impact we have to keep in mind that this convention is still a very young one and one with a rather specific and well defined approach and purview. As the convention has now 100 states parties and 19 signatories we of course need to focus on universalization to help building and strengthening the international norms of this convention so they become an integral part of universally accepted International Humanitarian Law. But we also have looked at some more direct impact by engaging in a structured dialogue with countries, which for one reason or another have shown reservations against joining the convention, with a particular view also at reducing the use of cluster munitions in the Middle

East.

On the other hand we – together with civil society - have elaborated the concept of so called “country coalitions”. The idea is very simple; to set up with a country specific focus a framework for improved international cooperation among all relevant actors. We hope that this concept helps us to unite all relevant existing and potential actors in an informal framework. Such coalitions would, of course include representatives of the affected country, partnering states, international organizations, civil society and non-governmental organizations as well as operators on the ground and other relevant experts. In principle, the country coalitions would be coordinated by the affected country themselves together with a partner country in order to promote a more comprehensive

approach to an affected country’s specific challenges which should include all aspects of mine action, covering destruction of stocks, mine clearance in all its aspects, victim assistance, land release and mine education. We hope that this concept, which we have already promoted in a conference in South East Asia – and we are going to do the same in South East Europe in 2 weeks – is providing affected countries as well as donors with a tool to better and more effectively and efficiently deal with the scourge of cluster munition.

Needless to underline that such a concept is not entirely new. Similar concepts exist in other conventions but carry other acronyms. As the Presidency of the Convention on Cluster Munition we hope to be able to kick off some concrete processes and initiatives, ideally also covering the Middle East, which in the longer run will become self-sustaining. So far we have received positive responses also from this region, notably Iraq. In the end, these processes have to go hand in hand with all existing initiatives covering explosive remnants of war. So that’s why we also here today so we can share our experiences and demonstrate our readiness to work with other actors. I think the framework of Wilton Park is very conducive for such an exchange and provides an excellent context for a positive outcome. So I look forward having a fruitful discussion with you.

Thank you for your attention!