CONVENTION ON CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Meeting of Experts
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Protocol V

Statement on clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and existing explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Albania

Delivered by

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Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me on behalf of the Albanian Government to congratulate the organizers for the excellent arrangements.

Albania has consented to be bounded by Protocol V of the Convention on Conventional Weapons since 2006 and as such has taken the serious commitment to implement the obligations deriving from this Protocol.

Moreover, being a country that still suffers the contamination of explosive remnants of war, we have witnessed the harm that these can cause to innocent civilians, which makes us even more determined to fully eliminate the risk that these ammunition remnants pose to our people. *

As it has been mentioned already in our previous statements, the Government of Albania managed to complete successfully in 2009 the clearance of its northeastern border from the landmine and cluster munitions, which was a sad legacy of the Kosovo conflict in 1999. Despite this important achievement, the Government is still working to eliminate another considerable contamination throughout the country created mainly as a result of civil unrests in 1997, when a number of explosions at Ammunition Storage Sites (ASS) killed and injured many civilians while the throw-out ammunition
and injured many civilians while the thrown-out ammunition contaminated several areas. In addition, newly discovered remnants from the Second World War add up to this contamination throughout the country. As to date, there are at least 979 abandoned explosive ordnance casualties (145 killed and 834 injured) recorded all over Albania.

Thorough Technical Assessments, identified initially some 19 hotspots with more than 1.8 million sqm as contaminated with unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war.

In order to deal with the situation, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) has outlined a Plan of Action to clear all the UXO/ERW hotspot areas, within its National Plan for the Elimination of Excess Ammunition in Albania.

Clearance operations have been carried by an international clearance organization in cooperation with the Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit of the Albanian Armed Forces, under the coordination and monitoring of the Albanian Mine and Munitions Coordination Office, which is the Government’s office in charge of monitoring and coordination the clearance of these hotspots.

As a result, 8 hotspots have been cleared and certified as free of threat already by the Albanian Mines and Munitions
Coordination Office (AMMCO), and thousands of unexploded ordnance have been removed and disposed.

In addition, another major hotspot contaminated with unexploded ordnance in Albania, which was created in March 2008 as a result of a major explosion at a munitions dismantling facility near the capital Tirana, is still under clearance. An approximate area of 290,000 m2 has been searched and cleared already by an international clearance organization, while the Albanian Armed Forces are currently continuing clearance of this major hotspot under the monitoring of Albanian Mines and Munitions Coordination Office.

Along with the hotspots clearance operations, several activities are ongoing to provide assistance for the rehabilitation and social-economic reintegration of explosive remnants of war survivors. A “Needs Assessment of Social-Economic and Medical needs of marginalized Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) victims in Albania” supported by the Austrian Government is being carried out by a local NGO, under coordination and monitoring of AMMCO. The focus of the assessment is on reviewing the status of the survivors, identifying their specific needs and drafting due recommendations for assistance to the Government. Findings from this project are planned to be shared with the relevant ministries and other government and non-government sector at a national workshop in December 2013.
Furthermore, aiming to improve the rehabilitation capacities for the UXO survivors, several equipment, raw materials and components for the repairs and the production of prostheses and orthoses were provided in September this year to the Prosthetic Workshop in Kukes Regional Hospital with funding from the Government of Austria.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of Albania is determined to eliminate the risk and alleviate the consequences of these hotspots and finally free the country of the ammunition threat. Despite this determination, the country is facing serious financial challenges and for this reason, expressing our gratitude for the important support that the international community has provided to date, I would like to make a strong appeal and emphasize to the State Parties that we are still in need of your support.

We have shown our strong commitment and willing to create a safe environment for our people and also to fulfill our obligations under the Convention and this makes us optimistic to still count on your assistance so together we can accomplish our mission.

Thank you for your attention.