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Chairman: Ms. Kuvshynnykova (Vice-Chairman) (Ukraine)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 29: Assistance in mine action (*continued*)
(A/62/307; A/C.4/62/L.6)

1. **Mr. Hunger** (Switzerland) said that, as the only instrument of international humanitarian law which comprehensively addressed the problem of unexploded and abandoned munitions, Protocol V, on explosive remnants of war, to the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects held great potential. States parties should take measures for universalization and implementation of that Protocol, which was now in force. His Government hoped that the current discussions on cluster munitions in international forums would lead to the conclusion of a new instrument that would strengthen measures to eliminate the humanitarian consequences of those weapons.

2. The international community could not afford to lower its guard on the issue of landmines and explosive remnants of war while they remained a threat to the safety of persons and an obstacle to development. Approximately 40 States had still not banned anti-personnel mines and many non-State actors, including armed groups, continued to use them. He therefore appealed to the States concerned to accede to the 1997 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and to armed non-State actors to sign to the Deed of Commitment under the auspices of the international humanitarian organization Geneva Call. In that context, Switzerland continued to advocate implementation of the Nairobi Action Plan 2005-2009, designed to bring an end to the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines. The eighth meeting of States parties to the Convention scheduled for November 2007 would enable the international community to measure progress.

3. His Government recognized the important role played by the United Nations Mine Action Service as the focal point for mine action. Only through clear mandates and common objectives could all United Nations partners effectively combat the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war. National authorities also had a crucial role to play, and international cooperation should focus on strengthening capacities in the area of mine action.

4. Switzerland's 2008-2011 strategy for mine action envisaged maintaining the current level of project financing (\$14 million annually) for demining, mine education, victim assistance and advocacy activities. That strategy supported the work of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, which, included operational assistance to affected countries and funds for research. The Centre also assisted Member States in implementing the Convention. He invited Member States to avail themselves of the Centre's services, in particular in developing their national mine-action standards.

5. He encouraged support for the integration of mine action in development cooperation, including assistance to victims. Switzerland had actively promoted the implementation of national victim-assistance strategies, including projects for improved first aid and socio-economic reintegration.

6. Switzerland was encouraged by the process of consultations regarding draft resolution A/C.4/62/L.6 on assistance in mine action. Through collective commitment and shared responsibility at all levels, the international community, could move closer to achieving a mine-free world.

7. **Mr. Kemp** (Australia) said that his Government was a leading contributor to international demining efforts, survivor assistance, mine-risk education and integrated mine action, having in 2005 committed \$75 million for mine action over the next five years, in addition to \$100 million over the previous decade. Most of Australia's assistance went to mine-affected countries in its region, including Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Viet Nam and Sri Lanka, but it was also clearing landmines and explosive remnants of war in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon.

8. Australia increasingly focused on integrating mine action with community-development activities for mine-affected communities and helping survivors to rebuild their livelihoods. Activities under integrated programmes in Cambodia and Laos, carried out in partnership with Australian NGOs, included livelihood assistance, land-mapping and titling, community infrastructure and water and sanitation facilities.

9. In recognition of the importance of mine action, the Government had established the position of Special Representative on Mine Action, whose responsibilities included global coordination of international donor

resources for mine action. Furthermore, as current President of the meeting of States parties to the Ottawa Convention, Australia was seeking to advance international mine action and to universalize the Convention.

10. **Ms. Haile** (Eritrea) said that, as a party to the Convention, Eritrea believed action must be taken to ensure the return of normalcy to the lives of its own people and those of the region, faced with the major threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance. Landmines were prevalent throughout its territory, as a legacy of a 30-year war of independence and more recent border conflicts with Ethiopia. About one third of the country was contaminated by landmines

11. Rural populations and internally displaced persons were the main victims. For Eritrea, one of the most severely affected countries, mine clearance was a priority for long-term recovery and development.

12. A mine-clearance mission began in 1991 had led to the establishment of a national demining centre, which received bilateral expert assistance in all aspects of its humanitarian demining operations, as well as developing a potentially autonomous infrastructure. According to its tradition of self-reliance, Eritrea had adopted a policy of "ownership" to empower its agents to play a primary role in the planning and implementation of programmes, with foreign donors assisting in capacity-building.

13. The Government focused on eliminating the threat of mines, facilitating the return of internally displaced persons and ensuring the safe use of land. A considerable area had been cleared. Furthermore, a mine-action strategy had been developed to establish the legal and institutional framework for the participation of NGOs, and to oversee compliance with the Ottawa Convention. Much importance had been placed on education and training of all actors, from mine experts to ordinary people living in affected areas. Eritrea was fully aware that mine victims should participate in decision-making and have access to development opportunities. The Government had also incorporated the needs of landmine survivors into its plans for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

14. She reiterated Eritrea's full commitment to the creation of a regional and international environment free of anti-personnel mines, and to the struggle at the

national, regional and international level for the elimination of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

15. **Mr. Ahmad** (Pakistan) observed that, despite the encouraging decline in civilian casualties as a result of mine action throughout the world, millions of lives were still threatened by landmines and explosive remnants of war in old and new theatres of conflict, and the entire peacebuilding effort in such areas was compromised. More international support had to be channelled to mine clearance and mine-risk education, the rehabilitation of mine victims, the use and sharing of relevant new technologies and the development of national capacities and ownership.

16. The focus of discussion and action should be on humanitarian demining. A significant contribution to mine action had also been made by States which were not parties to the Ottawa Convention. The United Nations should not advocate the universalization of conventions that did not take into account the positions and concerns of States, nor should there be any attempt to impose treaty obligations on States not parties to a treaty. Also, technical issues such as the detectability of mines other than anti-personnel mines, which were not directly related to humanitarian demining, should be discussed in other forums. Moreover, United Nations policies, strategies and activities related to mine action must be subject to approval by Member States.

17. Pakistan supported the eventual elimination of anti-personnel mines but had been unable to sign the Ottawa Convention owing to its legitimate security concerns. Pakistan was instead a party to the amended Protocol II to the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons, which allowed responsible use of landmines. Under that Protocol, Pakistan had regulated their use and effectively excluded civilians from mined areas by means of marking, fencing and monitoring. Pakistan produced only detectable anti-personnel mines, and it favoured the negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament of an international legal instrument against the transfer of anti-personnel mines.

18. Pakistan had a long record of supporting international and United Nations humanitarian mine-clearance operations and training, in the most mine-contaminated areas like Cambodia, Afghanistan, Angola and Kuwait. It had been involved in other demining operations under United Nations auspices in Somalia, Eastern Slovenia, Western Sahara and Bosnia,

had provided demining training in Sri Lanka, and would be providing mine-action teams as part of the United Nations Mission in the Sudan. It would continue to play a role in mine clearance and mine action.

19. **Mr. Orel** (Ukraine) said that mine action was an integral component of United Nations humanitarian and development activities. The United Nations Mine Action Service, with its key role in policymaking, coordination and advocacy, had been doing commendable work; and the readiness of the United Nations to apply suggestions made by Member States regarding coordination, integration, prioritization, scope of mine action, political commitment and information-sharing was especially praiseworthy.

20. Mine-action strategies should set short-, medium- and long-term priorities, and the needs of the mine-affected community must determine the parameters for assistance. The allure of operational mine clearance should not deflect attention from other aspects of mine action such as victim assistance, social rehabilitation and stockpile destruction, all of which required donor contributions.

21. Assistance was especially needed in countries where mines and unexploded ordnance not only impeded post-conflict reconstruction and development but also posed a direct threat to health, security and the environment. The United Nations must continue to build national capacities for mine action. His own country had experienced the results of the uncontrolled use of mines, which were still being discovered more than half a century after the end of the Second World War. It had also had to deal with the recent emergency at an artillery base located close to a populated city, where rocket-propelled ammunition stockpiled there had been detonated by fires, causing serious damage to the region's economy and to civilian property. With assistance from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, work was progressing on the deactivation and destruction of the rest of that unexploded ordnance.

22. Ukraine also had valuable experience in modern demining technologies and could quickly train skilled specialists at its advanced logistics base. Ukrainian demining units operated in various regions, including the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Sierra Leone and Lebanon, under United Nations standards and operational procedures.

23. Ukraine was convinced that the total prohibition of anti-personnel mines should be the ultimate goal. In the meantime, the Ottawa Convention and the Convention on Conventional Weapons and its Protocols, if properly implemented, were effective instruments for protecting both combatants and civilians.

24. **Mr. Belkheir** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that landmines left over from the Second World War had caused many deaths and injuries in his country. Despite attention devoted to the landmine issue by the General Assembly, by recent international instruments relating to persons with disabilities and by the Ottawa Convention, failure to place responsibility squarely on States that laid landmines in the first place remained a stumbling block to demining efforts. Those States should provide maps, demining equipment and victim reparations and rehabilitation.

25. He reiterated his delegation's view that Protocol V to the Convention on Conventional Weapons should be amended to cover explosive remnants of wars that had taken place in the first half of the previous century and to affirm that demining responsibility must be shouldered by those States that had laid the landmines.

26. **Ms. Luzungo Mtamboh** (Zambia) said that although Zambia had not been involved in conflict situations, there were contaminated areas along its borders resulting from liberation struggles waged by several of its neighbours. The people of Zambia nevertheless had felt the impact of the mines, which had maimed and displaced persons and disrupted economic activity and development. The Government had taken responsibility for funding mine clearance in all known mined areas by the year 2011. Owing to limited funding, it had not been possible to carry out a comprehensive nationwide survey of landmines, but considering the extent of competing development priorities, the amount already allocated for mine clearance was an indication of Zambia's commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Ottawa Convention.

27. Further assistance was crucial if the Government was to reach its 2011 clearance targets, and in that connection, her delegation extended its appreciation to the United Nations for its support in the destruction of Zambia's stockpiles of anti-personnel mines. More recently, Zambia had received support which would

facilitate efforts to meet its clearance deadline, remove blockages to community development and improve national economic development. It had made significant progress. In accordance with the Nairobi Action Plan, 2005-2009, Zambia hoped its partners would provide \$3 million to complete mine destruction by 2011. She urged the partners to continue assisting countries in mine clearance and mine-risk education.

28. As to the need to eliminate the use of cluster munitions, she said Zambia stood ready to participate in the elaboration of a treaty on that issue. She also reiterated her delegation's support for a consensus on draft resolution A/C.4/62/L.6.

29. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia), noting that for a decade her Government had been trying to implement the activities called for under the Ottawa Convention, said that recently, it had upgraded its mine-action agency, largely in response to the growing indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines by the lawless armed groups operating in the country.

30. Colombia had made a number of advances. Anti-personnel mine policy and action had been decentralized to the most-affected departments, where mine action was being included in development planning. In addition, numerous departmental and municipal mine-action committees had been set up, and the local and municipal management capacities were being strengthened.

31. Twelve of the most affected departments had launched mine-risk education campaigns and distributed material in the most threatened towns. The town authorities had been alerted to the problem so that they could respond better to accidents caused by anti-personnel mines, and teams had provided information to over 1,000 local teachers and distributed thousands of notebooks containing cautionary advice to children living in the mined areas.

32. Public and private institutions both nationally and locally were assisting the victims of anti-personnel mines. In the most affected departments in the country, staff had been trained in mine-victim assistance and in follow-up; and with help from Japan, the hospitals offering victim-rehabilitation services had been upgraded. The laws in force were also gradually being amended to offer better protection to victims of mine accidents and restore lost rights. There was a rehabilitation programme especially for members of the military, who represented two thirds of the victims.

33. Through consciousness-raising and advocacy campaigns, the Government, working with organizations, the media and well-known artists, was bringing the issue to the attention of both the Colombian public and the international community.

34. Colombia had dismantled its anti-personnel-mine factories and completed the destruction of its arsenal in accordance with the Ottawa Convention. Close to 1,000 mines had been retained, as allowed by the Convention, for military-training purposes, but because the lawless armed groups were using a completely different kind of anti-personnel mine, it had been decided to destroy that military stock as well.

35. Four task forces had been set up in 2007 for humanitarian mine clearance in a number of military bases that had protective mine fields and in areas that had been mined by the illegal armed groups. Several minefields had already been cleared, has had two mined areas in an indigenous community in the south of the country, with support from the Organization of American States and international monitors. Mine clearance would be complete in all military bases by 2011, as mandated by the Convention. Yet, for all its plans to assign more task forces to clear the civilian areas, the Government was unable to keep pace with the increasingly indiscriminate use of mines by the illegal armed groups in their attempts to halt the advance of the Armed Forces and intimidate the local population.

36. In all its achievements thus far, Colombia had received valuable assistance from international organizations and especially the United Nations Mine Action Team. Yet the challenge for Colombia was not an easy one; the growing number of victims of mine accidents, in conjunction with the forced displacement of populations by the illegal armed groups, made it necessary to concentrate primarily on the communities which were suffering the most socially and economically from the use of anti-personnel mines.

Draft resolution A/C.4/62/L.6

37. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that, at the request of the sponsors, action on draft resolution A/C.4/62/L.6 would be postponed to a later date.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.