

Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

14 November 2022

Protocol V: Explosive Remnants of War

Thank you President

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election as President of the Sixteenth Annual Conference of Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). We assure you of our full support.

Australia is steadfast in its commitment to the goals of Protocol V, to enhancing its implementation and promoting its universalisation. In this vein, we extend a warm welcome to the Philippines as the 97th State Party to Protocol V. We also commend you, Ambassador, for the significant outreach you have conducted to promote universalisation of this instrument.

Chair,

2022 saw some positive developments in addressing ERW, as countries started to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have also seen new contamination in many parts of the world. Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine – which Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms - has seen the threat of ERW in Ukraine escalate significantly. Australia is also concerned by ongoing ERW contamination in parts of Myanmar and by access restrictions faced by humanitarian operators.

Chair,

Australia recognises the serious humanitarian problems caused by ERW and the unacceptable risks it poses to communities in many regions.

In light of these risks and reflecting our commitment to combatting the threats posed by ERW, Australia continues to work with States, civil society and local populations in our region to safely dispose of unexploded ordnance.

In our immediate region, ERW have and continue to pose a very real threat to the safety of Pacific Island communities. As well as endangering human lives, these remnants impact livelihoods and restrict the use of land for socio-economic development.

That's why, in addition to our broader mine action program, Australia has made an enduring contribution to ERW clearance in the South-West Pacific through an initiative called "Operation Render Safe", managed by the Australian Defence Force.

Operation Render Safe safely disposes of ERW from the Second World War, as well as providing education and training to improve national capabilities. The Australian Defence Force also conducts surveys to identify, prioritise, and dispose of ERW as part of this Operation.

Australia works closely with host nations, at their invitation, in determining where and how operations are carried out. Allow me to highlight a few recent examples of this work.

Australia has continued its cooperation with the Solomon Islands on unexploded ordnance to boost the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force capacity to safely extract and dispose of ERW. In 2022, Australia provided the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force with critical equipment and delivered two training courses accredited to UN International Mine Actions Standards level two.

This complements ongoing training and operational support to the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force through an embedded Australian Defence Force (ADF) Explosive Ordnance Disposal advisor and operational funding. To continue building our region's capacity, Australia will also support the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force to deliver UN International Mine Actions Standards level one training to Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

In September this year, Australia also successfully supported the Government of Nauru with unexploded ordnance disposal under Operation Render Safe. As part of a joint activity between Australia, United States, Canada, and New Zealand, Australia supported initial scoping to conduct an Operation Render Safe exercise in which 22 aerial bombs were located for removal from Tuvalu waters.

Chair,

We pay particular tribute to the courage of clearance operators in their difficult and dangerous work. The development of new technologies to reduce risk, including remote detection, ground penetrating radar, and detection algorithms are areas we are watching with interest.

Allow me to conclude by urging all states parties to strictly abide by their obligations under this Protocol, and calling on non-members to consider joining without delay.

Thank you.

(617 words)