

Speech on at the 17th Meeting of the State Parties to the Mine Ban Convention (Ottawa Convention) and its Institutionalisation and Mainstreaming in Sri Lanka

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Ambassador of Switzerland, the Chairperson of this Session,

Your excellencies, Friends and Colleagues,

Very Good morning Everybody.

I am very pleased to participate in this important high-level forum of 17th Meeting of the State Parties to the Mine Ban Convention (Ottawa Convention)

Background

In Sri Lanka the 3 decades long civil conflict between the Security Forces and the LTTE left many areas in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the country contaminated by Anti-Personal Mines (APM) and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW).

It is reported, that both the Sri Lankan Security Forces and the LTTE laid land mines. Further, the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) also used land mines during the period of 1987-1990 when they were present on a peacekeeping mission in the Northern and Eastern Part of Sri Lanka. The protective mine fields were used by all parties for defensive positions. Initial Survey indicates that approximately 1,302 Sq.km area in the Northern and Eastern Provinces were suspected to be contaminated with Anti-Personal Mines and ERW.

Vision- Mine Free Si Lanka in 2020

The Sri Lanka's Vision is to "Make Sri Lanka A Mine Free Country by 2020" and thereby, create a peaceful harmonious, prosperous and co-existence principle based society that will achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and economic and social prosperity.

The Government of Sri Lanka expressed its commitment by being a signatory to the Ottawa Mine Ban Convention to end the sufferings and casualties caused by Anti-Personal Mines (APM) and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) by Banning the Production, Use, Stockpiling and Transfer of APM, Clearing the mine fields and ensure destruction of the stockpiles and; Provision of assistance to the victims. The Ottawa Mine Ban Convention was signed in 2017 and entered into force in June 1, 2018. This demonstrates the commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka.

Impacts of Land Mines

The conflict created Anti-Personal Mines and ERW led to Deaths, casualties, Injuries and loss of limbs by stepping on land mines, Created Suspected Hazardous Area (SHA), Restricted movement of people, Obstacle to safe return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Refugee returnees. The land mines also made lands unsuitable for cultivation and development, block access to paddy fields, fishing jetties, grazing lands and community infrastructure, denied citizens access to service deliveries, social and economic infrastructure. It also led to convert the productive paddy fields into mine-fields.

Mine Action Programme: Remarkable Achievements

The Government's commitment and concentrated dedicated efforts made remarkable achievements in the demining process. The District of Batticaloa is completely made a mine-free District in 2017 which is commendable. Further, the 1,302 Sq.km of contaminated Areas was reduced to 26 Sq.km in 2018. This remarkable progress is achieved because of the high-level commitment of the Government and collaboration and partnership with donor agencies and Development Partners and Implementing partners. I wish to specially express my sincere appreciation to the Governments of UK, USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, Switzerland, India, Norway, Sweden, Russia, China and other donors. I also wish to very specially thank the implementing partners namely, the Sri Lanka Army, Halo, DASH, MAG, SHARP and others for their ground-level tireless efforts to make Sri Lanka's vision a reality. The National Mine Action Centre of the Ministry of Resettlement, Rehabilitation, Northern Development and Hindu Religious Affairs and also the high-level Special Task Force headed by H.E. the President through the Presidential Task Force on Northern and Eastern Provinces Development has provided strong leadership and guidance for accelerating the demining programme. The progress and achievements of Sri Lanka on demining has attracted many countries to learn some of the best practices from Sri Lanka.

National Strategic Plan on Mine Action

The Government of Sri Lanka in consultation with the National Mine Action Centre and with other implementing partners and development partners developed a 5-Year Strategic Plan from 2016-2020 with prioritised strategies and actions to achieve the Vision and Mission of making Sri Lanka a mine free country by 2020. The implementation of Sri Lanka National Mine Action Strategy has resulted in clearance and release of significant Sq.km once dangerous land and reduced casualties and injury rates. In this regard a monitoring and tracking tool and an Information Management System known as - **Information Management System for Mine Action** has been developed to review the progress, address issues and fulfill the reporting requirements of the Mine Ban Convention.

According to the statistics and evidences, the Confirmed Hazardous Area (CHA) is 26 Sq.km as of 2018. The hotspots are Kilinochchi District 11 Sq.km, Mullaitivu

District 8.4 Sq.km, Vavuniya District 1.9 Sq.km Jaffna District 1.85 Sq.km and Mannar District 1.81 Sq.km

Stockpiled Destruction

As at November 2018, it is reported that 51,549 Anti-Personal Mines have been destroyed. Sri Lanka possessed 83,767 Stockpiled Anti-Personal Mines of which a demolition plan has been prepared for 62,316 Stockpiled Anti-Personal Mines over a period of 3 years ending in 2020. The balance 21,454 Stockpiled Anti-Personal Mines will be used for training purposes.

Mine Risk Education (MRE)

The Government of Sri Lanka has initiated action to institutionalise and incorporate Mine Risk Education (MRE) into the school curriculum of Grade 6 – 9 under Civic Education and Life Competency subjects. 212 schools in the Northern and Eastern Provinces have incorporated MRE and 65,822 school community members, including teachers, students and principals are covered under MRE.

Demining to Complement Resettlement and Rehabilitation Programme

The mine action programme has significantly contributed to resettlement, reconciliation and peacebuilding programme. Complementing the mine action programme as part of the initiative on the resettlement and rehabilitation. The Government initiated many interventions such as; Release of Lands which are under State custody to the original owners, Resettle the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) with Durable Solutions, Facilitate to resettle the Refugee Returnees from Tamil Nadu to the motherland, Support Economic Empowerment Initiatives, Livelihood Assistance and Housing and Infrastructure Programmes to the conflict affected IDPs, War-widows, rehabilitated ex-combatants, and conflict affected vulnerable groups.

Converted Mine-fields to Paddy Fields

With regard to demining programme, total areas released since year 2002 to end August 2018 amounts to 1,276 Sq.km of total area has been released in 05 Northern Districts, 3 Eastern Districts and 2 North-Central Districts and are now no longer dangerous either due presence suspected presence of Anti- Personal Mines and are fit for normal human activity.

Lessons Learnt

- The Sri Lanka Army mapped the land mine fields whereas the LTTE did not map the land mine fields. Therefore, all uncleared areas posed threats due to large area of suspected mine fields.
- Some mine fields are still being discovered while work is in progress.

- According to the UN estimates the cost of laying land mine is approximately US \$ 3 whereas the cost for removal is approximately US \$1000. The human cost is still higher. Acceleration of the demining requires more funding support from donors.
- Working in demining programmes is highly risky and less rewarding while humanitarian consideration is significant.
- Demining approach can be manual, use of sniffing dogs or mechanical. However, when it comes to manual using metal detectors, the highly trained explosive sniffing dogs are more effective.
- The evidence-based Non-Technical Surveys can help to reduce the cost of demining.
- Consideration should be given to high impact demining (Residential Areas) rather than less impact areas.
- Human resources need to be expanded to achieve the 2020 vision of making mine free Sri Lanka.
- Although the normal standard for demining depth is 15 cm, in areas where the soil is loose and sandy, the demining depth has been increased to 20 cm etc.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka has achieved considerable progress in demining programme. Many Special Missions and Envoys have highly commended the achievements made in the demining programmes within a short time. The capacity and the professionalism of the Sri Lanka Army and the support and contribution of the implementing partners and the high-level commitment of the Government of Sri Lanka has contributed to this success. The special contribution of the Donors has also helped to achieve the expectations of the Government.

It is envisaged that Sri Lanka as a State Party will no longer have mined areas under their territory or control beyond year 2020. The demining programmes have made the once dangerous lands into prosperous and productive lands with safe peaceful human settlement.

We will continue to work closely with Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and learn from best practices and success stories.

Thank you.