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United States Mission to the OSCE
U.S. Statement for the
Forum for Security Cooperation:
Security Dialogue on Mine Action

As delivered by Arms Control Counselor Daniel Wartko
September 20, 2023

Thank you, Madam Chair,

And thank you to our distinguished panel of experts for sharing their insights with us today.

Humanitarian mine action and explosive ordnance risk education are priorities for the United States. In fact, the United States is THE largest international donor for conventional weapons destruction, which includes landmines and unexploded ordnance. Our efforts to address these hazards protect local communities and facilitate their economic development.

Educating the public on these risks is a cost-effective way to equip communities with the knowledge they need to identify, avoid, and report landmines, unexploded ordnance, improvised explosive devices, and other explosive remnants of war. As we heard today, these programs especially help children in post-conflict communities gain a better understanding of the magnitude of the threat posed by unexploded ordnance. Between October 2021 and October 2022, the U.S. Department of State funded this life-saving risk education for more than 3.4 million recipients worldwide.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, U.S.-funded face-to-face explosive ordnance risk education sessions have reached 112,000 Ukrainians in schools, neighborhoods, bomb shelters, and even soccer tournaments. Our implementing partners have reached more than 18 million people through social media to provide risk education information. These social media ads have registered more than 73 million views, meaning that they often reach the same users multiple times, helping them learn more effectively. Between March and May 2023, we also supported a risk education radio campaign on Ukraine's most popular stations that reached 5.2 million listeners. The United States is proud to support the OSCE's Support Program for Ukraine, which leads a project providing critical humanitarian demining support for Ukrainian agencies.

Our campaigns aspire to include all members of society when mitigating the deadly risks posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance. In particular, the meaningful participation of women in these efforts increases the efforts' effectiveness. Using a gender-responsive approach to policies, U.S.-funded demining programs in Ukraine and elsewhere provide pathways for women to become deminers, to supervise and train other deminers, to engage and survey communities, to contribute to mine action planning, and to lead survivor advocacy.

Madam Chair,

Despite ongoing diplomatic and economic pressure from the international community, Russia's brutality continues unabated in Ukraine. The success of Ukraine's defense against Russia's invasion depends on its ability to maintain sufficient and effective stockpiles of munitions. Ukraine knows, and we all know, that its efforts to defend itself will inevitably leave behind explosive remnants of war, but it is taking the steps to minimize the effects while defending itself against Russia's brutal aggression. Unfortunately, Russia has not demonstrated similar interest in minimizing civilian impact. In fact, it is quite the opposite.

The United States stands with Ukraine in its fight against Russia's aggression. We will stand with Ukraine after Russia's defeat to ensure that all Ukrainians, young and old, will be able to prosper in a country free from the humanitarian hazards of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

Thank you, Madam Chair.