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**FY 2023 Outside Witness Testimony for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State,  
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS)**

**The Department of State Conventional Weapons Destruction Program**

As humanitarian demining organizations, The HALO Trust (USA), Mines Advisory Group America (MAG), and PeaceTrees Vietnam submit this testimony as partners of the U.S. Government in addressing threats to peace, security, and human lives posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and insecure weapons stockpiles. HALO, MAG, and PeaceTrees Vietnam are independent partners of the Department of State's Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) program. We are helping to save lives and restore livelihoods in nearly 40 countries and territories. This testimony is also supported by Legacies of War, a renowned advocacy and educational organization representing the Lao-American, Cambodian-American and Vietnamese-American community.

State Department humanitarian demining programs play a leading international role in responding to humanitarian crises such as the conflict in Ukraine, preventing casualties, allowing displaced families to return to their livelihoods, enabling farmers to till their fields, supporting economic development, ensuring post-conflict stabilization, and promoting safety through securing weapons and explosive materials that could fall into terrorist hands.

Given the importance of global demining and weapons security programs, we respectfully ask that you include the following requests in the FY 2023 SFOPS budget:

- 1. \$290 million for the State Department's Conventional Weapons Destruction program;**
- 2. Specific allocations for Conventional Weapons Destruction Programs: \$80,000,000 for programs in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia (\$50,000,000 for Laos), \$10,000,000 for programs in Sri Lanka, \$10,000,000 for programs in Angola, \$4,000,000 for programs in Zimbabwe, \$30,000,000 for programs in Afghanistan (of the \$30m, \$5m should be made available for IED removal in Afghanistan), and \$2,000,000 for programs in Nagorno Karabakh. The recommendation also includes additional funds above the prior year level for increased demining activities in Ukraine.**

**The State Department Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) Program**

The State Department CWD program has many benefits, but serves three primary goals: 1) To enhance regional security by destroying and securing weapons at risk of diversion to terrorists, insurgents, and other violent non-state actors; 2) To improve stability and prosperity by clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination, thereby returning land to safe and productive use; and 3) To promote US foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

### **Saving lives**

CWD programs save lives. The most recent Landmine Monitor recorded 7,073 people that were killed or injured by mines or other explosive remnants of war across 51 countries in 2020. Nearly 2,000 of those killed or injured were children. This number of casualties is more than twice the number in 2013, with the most casualties taking place in Syria and Afghanistan.<sup>ii</sup>

Landmines continue to affect families and communities long after conflict has ended, threatening lives and disrupting livelihoods. No parent should fear that their child might suffer a fatal injury simply by walking to school or playing outside. Landmines kill indiscriminately, and we must continue to eliminate these threats.

### **Food Security**

Demined land is most often used for growing crops and livestock, thereby advancing food security at a moment when the world faces a looming famine. In no place is this more starkly apparent than in Ukraine, where US-funded teams are clearing antitank mines to enable farmers to get their tractors back into the fields even as bombs continue to fall.

### **Economic Development**

CWD activities also promote economic development that can transform communities after conflict. Within weeks of mine clearance, displaced families can return home and plant crops. Communities can build roads, schools, hospitals, and vital infrastructure. A 2019 report conducted by the United Nations Development Program in Lebanon showed that every dollar spent on mine action generated an economic return of \$4.15, helping to alleviate poverty in some of the poorest parts of the country.<sup>iii</sup> And in Mozambique, which is now mine free, a 2018 National Bureau of Economic Research report indicated that without clearance of mines, Mozambique's GDP would have been 15-25% lower in 2015.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Security and Stability in Fragile States**

Weapons security management programs funded by the CWD account support security, through ammunition storage training and the destruction of insecure weapons, such as shoulder-launched missiles capable of downing aircraft. These programs are essential for preventing unplanned explosions that put thousands at risk and they keep weapons from falling into the wrong hands. This type of programming is critical in areas like Libya, which saw a massive build up of arms during Gaddafi's rule and distribution of weapons and ammunition in the campaign against him – fueling the proliferation of deadly items across North Africa, the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. In Mozambique, weapons management programs are essential to prevent insurgents from overrunning national authorities and seizing weapons. Further, in the Northern Triangle as well as Ecuador and Peru, weapons and ammunition security management programs also help to combat the illicit flow of black-market weapons that fuel violence and emigration.

### **Promoting Positive U.S. Leadership**

While China has used debt trap financing to seize control of national assets in Africa, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, U.S.-funded demining programs work in these same regions to take land that is currently too dangerous to use and transform it into an economic asset available to impoverished local populations. These programs advance our interests and our values as

Americans by building livelihoods building ties with both host governments and the general population in regions that are of growing importance for the world economy. Around the world deminers sporting U.S. flags on their gear provide life-changing relief to some of the world's most vulnerable communities. Additionally, weapons security programs foster strong bilateral security relationships with strategic partners.

**Supporting CWD Programs in Ukraine, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Angola, Zimbabwe, and Nagorno Karabakh**

Ukraine already contained significant landmine and explosive contamination in the eastern region before the recent conflict. Now, the country is facing far greater levels of unexploded bombs in major population centers that will threaten civilians for years to come. The risk will be particularly acute as civilians move throughout the country when, hopefully, the fighting soon ends. State Department implementing partners are already on the ground working to save lives from explosives, and increased funding is urgently needed to enable the elimination of these deadly devices as soon as possible.

Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia remain heavily impacted by U.S. cluster bomblets and other explosive hazards. Laos is considered the most heavily bombed country in history, suffering an estimated 50,000 casualties from explosive remnants of war. Cambodia, which contains additional significant landmine contamination has suffered over 64,000 casualties from explosive hazards since 1979. In Vietnam, at least 105,000 casualties from explosive threats have been recorded. More resources are needed to remove these deadly items, demonstrate continued resolve to removing U.S. legacy ordnance, and strengthen diplomatic relations. An appropriation of \$80 million in FY23, with \$50 million for Laos, would expedite ongoing clearance efforts and demonstrate positive U.S. leadership in the region.

Since the end of Sri Lanka's decades-long civil war in 2009, U.S. demining assistance has been critical to allowing thousands of displaced families to return to their homes and develop their land. U.S. demining efforts have also enabled the reopening of schools and hospitals, the reconstruction of thousands of homes, and the reconstruction of the Jaffna railway – enabling access to Sri Lanka's northern ports. More than 262,600 mines have already been destroyed, and increased funding will keep Sri Lanka on track to be mine-impact free in the near future. An allocation of \$10 million will keep Sri Lanka on track to be mine-impact free in the near future.

Landmines in Angola have injured more than 80,000 people since they were first used in its civil war, but with the help of U.S. foreign aid, over 100,000 landmines have been destroyed. Demining must continue, especially in the rural areas of Angola, where some communities have been waiting decades for assistance. Funding at a level of \$10 million for demining in Angola is also necessary for the U.S. to implement *The DELTA Act*, legislation passed in December 2018 in support of wilderness management in the Okavango Delta region. In southeast Angola, landmines near the headwaters of the Okavango Delta kill elephants and other wildlife, hamper efforts to conduct biodiversity research, and interfere with anti-poaching initiatives.

Zimbabwe possesses very dense, unfenced minefields close to houses, schools, and clinics that kill livestock weekly and separate communities from viable sources of water. Over 1,600 casualties<sup>v</sup> have occurred due to explosive hazard accidents. Due to the predictable mine-laying

patterns along the Zimbabwean borders, demining teams in Zimbabwe have one of the highest mine-destruction rates of any global program. Supporting \$4 million for CWD programs in Zimbabwe will allow the country to achieve mine-free status as quickly as possible.

Afghanistan contains extremely high levels of explosive contamination, exacerbated by the recent fighting. Landmines, UXO, and, notably, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) all pose a significant threat to communities as they return to their livelihoods. An allocation of \$30 million, including \$5 million to support IED clearance, will help eliminate these deadly hazards, support security, and provide safe access for other forms of humanitarian relief. The Taliban has not blocked implementation of these programs in the past; the State Department executes the programs through trusted NGO implementing partners and does not provide any assistance to Taliban authorities.

The recent conflict in Nagorno Karabakh resulted in enormous levels of contamination by cluster munitions, rockets, and other explosive ordnance. These hazards are still present near homes, and litter farms and streets – presenting a grave humanitarian risk. Further, the removal of explosives is critical to continuing to rebuild infrastructure decimated during the conflict. An allocation of \$2 million in FY23 will allow ordnance removal efforts activities to scale up and ensure families can return to their livelihoods without fear of explosive threats.

## **Conclusion**

Since 1993, the U.S. has led global demining efforts, providing more than \$4.2 billion in assistance to more than 100 countries for CWD activities.<sup>vi</sup> With U.S. support, over 15 previously mined countries and territories around the world are now mine-free. We hope to see many more countries soon join this list.

U.S. demining and weapons security programs save lives, enable stabilization and rebuilding after countries have been ripped apart by conflict, enhance security, and promote U.S. interests while making a tangible difference in the lives of communities worldwide.

For these reasons, we hope the subcommittee will support strong funding for the State Department CWD program, for CWD programs in Ukraine, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Angola, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, and Nagorno Karabakh.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> U.S.A., Department of State, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. (2020). *The United States' Commitment to Conventional Weapons Destruction* (19<sup>th</sup> ed., January-December 2019, p.5). Waynesboro, VA: McClung Companies.

<sup>ii</sup> Landmine Monitor (Monitor). (2021, November). *Landmine Monitor 2021*. The Monitor. Retrieved May 24, 2022 from <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2021/landmine-monitor-2021.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> Hamade, K., & Srour, I. (2019, February 6). 2019, February 6). *Socio-economic benefits of mine action in Lebanon: United Nations Development Programme*. UNDP. Retrieved May 24, 2022, from <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/socio-economic-benefits-mine-action-lebanon>

<sup>iv</sup> Chiovelli, G., Michalopoulos, S., & Papaioannou, E. (2018). Landmines and Spatial Development. *NBER Working Paper Series*. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w24758>

<sup>v</sup> Zimbabwe. (2017, January 2). Retrieved from [http://www.the-monitor.org/en\\_gb/reports/2019/zimbabwe/casualties.aspx](http://www.the-monitor.org/en_gb/reports/2019/zimbabwe/casualties.aspx)

<sup>vi</sup> U.S.A., Department of State, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. (2021). *A Message from Assistant Secretary Timothy Alan Betts* (20<sup>th</sup> ed., January-December 2020, p.3). Waynesboro, VA: McClung Companies.