

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2024

The Honorable Christopher Coons
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
and Related Programs
SR-218
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations
and Related Programs
CH-374
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
SR-211
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Lee
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
RH-2470
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Coons and Diaz-Balart and Ranking Members Graham and Lee,

Thank you for your support of humanitarian demining programs under the State Department's Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) program in the House and Senate FY25 SFOPS appropriations reports. We are pleased to see the House include \$271.703 million in the FY25 SFOPS report for the CWD account, an increase from the FY24 allocation of \$258 million and from the Administration's FY25 request of \$270.650 million. We also appreciate the Senate including \$218 million for humanitarian demining in the CWD account, maintaining the figure allocated last year.

However, the omission of a Senate CWD topline will stall new and ongoing life-saving humanitarian demining programs and potentially close valuable weapons and ammunition security management programs, while flat funding humanitarian demining programs will not meet the demining needs as active conflicts heighten humanitarian and security risks from explosive items.

Earlier this year, 129 bipartisan Representatives sent a letter to House SFOPS leadership urging increased funding for the CWD account, emphasizing the importance of both demining and weapons and ammunition security management programs. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you include the following language (as included in the House SFOPS report) in the final FY25 SFOPS explanatory statement: **The Committee supports \$271.703 million for Conventional Weapons Destruction programs.**

Weapons and Ammunition Security Management Programs at Risk

In addition to demining, the CWD account funds vital weapons and ammunition security management programs to "mitigate security and public safety risks associated with excess,

obsolete, unstable, or poorly secured and maintained weapons and ammunition stockpiles, including [man-portable air defense systems] (MANPADS).”ⁱ Across Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean, CWD funds are helping to build host-nation government capacities to safely manage stockpiles of weapons and ammunition, ensure armories and storage facilities are physically secure, and support countries with weapons marking or destruction. These programs prevent unplanned explosions that can decimate cities, keep deadly weapons out of the hands of terrorist organizations and criminal actors, support stability, good governance and accountability, reduce trafficking of weapons, drugs, and people, and promote US leadership. In FY23, these programs the destruction of over 2,850 metric tons of unserviceable ammunition and more than 20,500 small arms and light weapons and the construction or rehabilitation of 84 armories.ⁱⁱ

CWD programs are low cost-high value - some programs receive well under \$1 million per year. Therefore, even a small reduction in funding resulting from lack of an could close weapons security programs – straining bilateral partnerships, forcing partners to seek help from other world powers, and increasing the propensity for violence, terror, and instability. These at-risk programs include the efforts in the Northern Triangle, where violence is driven by ready access to firearms and ammunition, the majority of which originated in security force stockpiles, Somalia, which suffers from severe arms trafficking issues involving local militias, al-Shabaab and ISIS,ⁱⁱⁱ Mozambique, where CWD programs are critical to address an ISIS-backed insurgency, and in the Caribbean, where armed gangs have been declared a public health crisis by CARICOM.^{iv}

Preventing Unplanned Ammunition Depot Explosions

Weapons security programs funded by the CWD account are critical for preventing unplanned ammunition storehouse explosions that can kill thousands, threaten U.S. embassies and those of our allies, and destroy economies. While the explosion in Beirut made the headlines in 2020, lesser-known government storehouse explosions in Cambodia, Chad, and Indonesia have already occurred in 2024. According to the most recent data from Small Arms Survey, between 1979 and 2021 there were at least 636 unplanned explosions at munitions sites, resulting in nearly 31,000 casualties.^v Most of these incidents occurred at state facilities and main causes include “handling errors and inappropriate working practices,” “inappropriate storage systems and infrastructure,” “poor security,” and “lack of surveillance leading to ammunition deterioration.”^{vi} CWD programs are designed to address these exact areas. Without a CWD allocation, the world may see more deadly unplanned explosions.

Preventing Weapons Diversions: Countering Terror and Crime, Supporting Stability

The CWD account also supports weapons security programs that reduce opportunities for weapons and ammunition, including highly lethal MANPADS and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), to be diverted to terrorist or criminal organizations. According to the State Department, “More than 1,000 civilians have been killed since 1970 by terrorists and other non-state actors in dozens of attacks against civilian aircraft using [MANPADS].”^{vii} Open-source research in Ukraine has uncovered that, since February 2022, 241 MANPADS and 1,332 anti-tank guided missiles have allegedly been illicitly diverted by Russian aligned actors.^{viii} Since 2006, CWD funding has removed more than 43,000 at-risk MANPADS and ATGMs worldwide that could have been used to attack America and its allies.^{ix} A reduction in CWD funding would

give terrorist and criminal groups, and America's adversaries, an advantage in accessing these highly destructive weapons.

Access to illegal conventional weapons also exacerbates conflict, disrupts peace processes, and can prop up weapons, drug, and human trafficking. In Libya, the looting of stockpiles during and after the overthrow of Gaddafi led to the availability of hundreds of thousands of weapons, which has fueled insecurity, insurgency, extremism and crime both in Libya and across the Sahel.^x CWD programs in Libya, and other Global Fragility Act-designated areas such as Mozambique and Coastal West Africa are now helping to support stability.

Demining Programs at Risk

From Ukraine to Laos, from Angola to the Solomon Islands, demining programs prevent casualties, promote development, enable post-conflict recovery, allow safe access for other forms of humanitarian aid, support food security, enable the return of displaced families, remove hazards that could harm U.S. troops, bolster stability, and ensure the U.S. removes its legacy ordnance. These programs are popular with local communities as well as regional and national governments, thereby bolstering US bilateral relations abroad. In FY23, CWD funding enabled the clearance of 47,218 acres of land and the destruction of 247,510 explosive devices.^{xi}

However, extensive explosive contamination in areas like Ukraine, southeast Asia, and the Middle East require explicitly allocated and increased resources to ensure communities can recover from conflict as quickly as possible. With flat funding, families desperately seeking relief may be forced to wait years for support to come. Further, the omission of a CWD topline will create bureaucratic challenges in establishing new programs, such as in Papua New Guinea, and may disrupt current demining programs across the globe.

CWD programs are critical for US national security, international stability, promoting US leadership, and saving lives worldwide. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Rep. Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Rep. Darrell Issa
Member of Congress

ⁱ U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Fiscal Year 2025* (2024), pg. 164, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/FY25-Congressional-Budget-Justification-FINAL_03052024.pdf

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. *To Walk the Earth in Safety, 23rd Edition* (2024), pg. 7

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- iii Global Organized Crime Index, *Somalia* (2023),
https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_profile_somalia_2023.pdf.
- iv CARICOM, *Declaration by Heads of Government on Crime and Violence as a Public Health Issue* (2023),
<https://caricom.org/declaration-by-heads-of-government-on-crime-and-violence-as-a-public-health-issue/>
- v Small Arms Survey, *Quick facts on unplanned explosions at munitions sites (UEMS)* (2022),
https://smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/UEMS-Infographic-Dec-2021-13_Jan_2022_update.pdf
- vi Small Arms Survey, *Quick facts on unplanned explosions at munitions sites (UEMS)* (2022)
- vii U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. *To Walk the Earth in Safety, 23rd Edition* (2024), pg. 9
- viii Figures from ongoing research conducted by The HALO Trust
- ix U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. *To Walk the Earth in Safety, 23rd Edition* (2024), pg. 9
- x Council on Foreign Relations, *Global Conflict Tracker: Violent Extremism in the Sahel* (2024),
<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>
- xi U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. *To Walk the Earth in Safety, 23rd Edition* (2024), pg. 6