



Federal Republic of Germany
Foreign Office

11TH MEETING OF STATES PARTIES OF THE CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

Geneva, 11. - 14.09.2023

Statement by Germany during Item 10 (c) *Clearance and destruction of cluster munitions remnants and risk education*

Mr. President,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

Concerning the clearance of contaminated areas, allow me to provide an update on the obligations that Germany still has to fulfil. Contamination by cluster munition remnants in Germany is limited to one area: a former military training site of the former Soviet Union close to Wittstock in Brandenburg.

This area has been used from 1953 to 1993 – for 40 years - as a military training site by the forces of the former Warsaw Pact both for ground operations and air to ground targeting practices, including as a bombing range. Therefore, the site is heavily contaminated not only with cluster munition remnants, but with all sorts of unexploded ordnance. Actually, only

between 1 and 4 % of unexploded ordnance finds consists in cluster munition remnants.

The suspected area of specifically cluster munition contamination is of 11 square kilometers. As of June 2023, we have cleared 6,14 km². 4,86 km² are still to be cleared until August 2025. Annual clearance rate has increased: from 0,85 km² in 2021, to 1,34 km² in 2022. A total of 6.792 cluster munition have been detected, recovered and destroyed by explosion on site until June 2023. **Despite this successes, it will be difficult to meet our 2025 deadline if we continue in this clearance pace.**

Until the end of June 2023, around 110 Million EUR have been spent for clearance at Wittstock. We have significantly increased financial means each year: from around 13 Million Euro in 2020, to 21 Million Euro in 2021, to 32 Million Euro in 2023.

Altogether, around 180 to 200 personnel are currently working on clearing the site at Wittstock. This is about 15 % of the workforce employed in explosive ordnance disposal in Germany. Due to the necessary safety precautions - safety distances must be maintained when clearing – **our capacity**

limits have been reached with the current number of clearance personnel.

As further increase in financial and personnel means will not result in an increased clearance output, **we are continuously looking to improve efficiency** of our clearance operations.

For example, we are currently trying to increase capacities in destruction blasting. When we have to blast cluster munitions and other explosive ordnance on site, the clearing personnel are not allowed to be in the safety area of the blasting for safety reasons. This blocks the clearing work. We are therefore currently building a storage facility for explosives that is closer to the site in order to shorten transport and preparation time before blasting. The shorter the time required for ammunition destruction, the shorter also the downtime of the clearing personnel.

As reported during last year's Meeting of State Parties, there are **various risk factors that influence the pace of our clearing operations. Many of these are exogenous and lie outside the control of German authorities.** Let me briefly mention a few:

- Environmental protection and nature conservation obligations need to be considered:
 - Due to the vegetation on the site, there is the need for controlled burning in order to proceed with sub-surface clearance operation. However, such burning can only be conducted within very limited time frames, owing to drought, as well as weather conditions and wind. The burning must take place outside the breeding season of birds. Also, the ground fauna, especially insects and lizards, must already be in their protected winter quarters, so that they are not affected by the burning. Favourable conditions for controlled burning are therefore usually only found on 1 or 2 days per year!
 - Environment and nature conservation requirements need to be ensured regarding the actual disposal of found explosive ordnance: Only explosive ordnance that is too dangerous to transport is destroyed on the site. The remaining explosive ordnance will be disposed of by the clearance service in a professional and environmentally sound manner.
- Necessary safety regulations and health of our staff is of utmost importance and need to be observed:

- New personnel must be trained and must maintain the necessary safety distances.
- The high temperatures (up to 40 degrees Centigrade in the shade, with work occurring in the sun), require frequent scheduled breaks. During the winter months, we experience temperatures as low as -10 degree for weeks at a time. When there is frost in the frozen ground, work cannot be carried out because mechanical force that is needed to open up the ground would then act on the sensitive detonators during uncovering. And that can quickly lead to detonations.
- Considerable precautions need to be taken because of an enhanced fire hazard, owing to serious drought in the region, especially around blasting areas. Several time-consuming preparatory steps have to be taken before any clearance operation: Access roads need to be prepared and cleared; Fire strips need to be established. A firebreak system surrounding the site that is 50 m wide and 90 km long has been established.
- Lastly, the high density of contamination with metal objects and other unexploded ordnance, a characteristic

of former military training sites, decreases the pace of cluster munition clearance.

A thorough examination of the various risk factors outlined above indicates **that for the time being a further increase in annual clearing performance seems unrealistic.**

Consequently, and for the sake of full transparency at this point in time Germany cannot ensure the completion of our clearing obligations by the end of our deadline in August 2025.

With a firm commitment to our clearance obligations, Germany will continue to monitor all mentioned factors and risks closely. Work plans are adapted and optimized on a constant basis.

Germany remains grateful for close coordination and partners' experience in possibilities to increase the efficiency of cluster munition survey and clearance applicable to the specific circumstances prevailing at cluster munition contaminated military training sites.

Let me assure you that Germany will continue to make every effort to fulfil our clearance obligations by 2025 or soon thereafter. We stand ready for your questions.

Thank you, Mr. President.