

Thank you, Mr. President. I am pleased to take the floor on behalf of the 13 member organizations of the Gender and Diversity Working Group - APOPO, Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines, Danish Church Aid, Danish Refugee Council, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the HALO Trust, Humanity and Inclusion, ICBL-CMC, Mines Advisory Group, Mines Action Canada, Mine Action Review, Norwegian People's Aid and SEHLAC.

We welcome the inclusion of gender and diversity language throughout the Vientiane Capital Action Plan in line with previously agreed language from the Lausanne Action Plan. That language is intended to improve the operational effectiveness of cluster munitions responses across all areas of the convention including survey and clearance, risk education, and victim assistance, and to ensure that no one is left behind. Organisations working in these fields everyday attest that effective mine action requires a gender and diversity sensitive approach. This is reinforced in the International Mine Action Standards, national mine action strategies and policies, and the organisational policies and procedures of operators.

We have noted that a very small number of states have expressed concerns about this language but the overwhelming majority of States Parties recognize the importance of ensuring that the implementation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions is inclusive, effective and leaves no one behind. We know that this language is not a barrier to universalization of the Convention as all but one affected State Not Party have been making national efforts to promote gender equality and inclusion in their mine action operations. Furthermore, we know that upholding commitments on gender and diversity remains true to the original text and spirit of the convention which recognises, and I quote, "*the need to provide age- and gender-sensitive assistance to cluster munition victims and to address the special needs of vulnerable groups*", and cites the Women, Peace and Security Agenda amongst several other relevant commitments.

They say that 'if you can measure it, you can manage it', and the review document notes the need to strengthen the collection, analysis and use of data on gender and diversity mainstreaming. With this in mind, we welcome the addition of a new indicator under cross-cutting action number four, indicator b, which measures the "percentage of women in technical, operational and decision-making positions engaged in national implementation of the Convention". This data is already routinely collected by mine action organisations, and included in Mine Action Review's country reports, and can be easily reported to the Convention. Collating this data across our sector will help demonstrate the direction of travel towards mine action's contribution to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and gender equality.

Meeting here in Laos and taking part in the field visit to start the meeting serves to highlight the incredible work affected states, like Laos, have done to create inclusive and effective clearance programs. We congratulate our host State, Lao PDR, as one of the top-performing States Parties, achieving a Very Good score in Mine Action Review's assessment of gender and diversity in its national mine action programme. Lao PDR provides many examples of good practice from which other affected States Parties can learn. These include integrating gender across all core policy and strategy documents for the UXO sector; appointing gender focal points for each of the sector's four technical working groups on Survey and Clearance, Risk Education, Victim Assistance, and Information Management; and adopting a Gender and Inclusion Code of Conduct for the NRA and UXO Lao. Clearance operators in Lao PDR are also mainstreaming gender and diversity effectively and have made concerted efforts to improve the gender balance of their teams. Some operators are now approaching or achieving gender

parity across all levels of their survey and clearance programmes, including among staff in managerial and supervisory positions and in operational roles.

We would also like to acknowledge the work of all the Gender Focal Points that supported the implementation of the Lausanne Action Plan before we move forward with the Vientiane Capital Action Plan. Mr President, as organisations working every day to combat the impact of cluster munitions and other explosive ordnance, our members encourage States Party to adopt inclusive language in this conference's outcome documents and we stand ready to support affected states parties through the delivery of inclusive mine action approaches.

Thank you.