

Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention – 18th Meeting of State Parties: UK statement

Mr President,

As this is the first time my delegation has taken the floor, let me begin by thanking you for your astute leadership this year in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

For nearly two decades, the United Kingdom has provided regular updates to the Convention on our progress to clear the Falkland Islands, the only part of UK territory contaminated with mines. I am proud to announce today that clearance operations concluded on Saturday 14 November. The UK and its overseas territories are now free of anti-personnel mines.

The UK has thus fulfilled its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention. In line with Action 25 of the Oslo Action Plan, we will shortly submit a voluntary declaration of completion.

While the Convention entered into force for the UK in 1999, clearance operations in the Falkland Islands could not begin until we had determined the scale and complexities of the task ahead. This commenced with a six-year Joint Feasibility study with Argentina, completed in 2007. This comprehensive study allowed us to fully appreciate the environmental, technical, and logistical constraints we would be up against. This included considering the most effective methods to access mines in challenging locations such as in very remote areas, buried under 10-metre high sand dunes or in swampy peat.

Clearance operations began in 2008 by testing the approach to search for and then remove mines in three areas. The lessons learned from this first operation gave us the confidence to expand the Programme, eventually culminating in the clearance of 122 minefields. Over the course of the Programme, our skilled team built invaluable experience working in unpredictable weather and tackling difficult terrain, developing creative solutions to manage the technical and physical challenges they faced. Indeed, the clearance management processes implemented on the Falklands have informed the universal International Mine Action Standards.

11 years later, we have now released over 23 million square metres of land back to the Falkland Islands community. We are deeply grateful to our diligent international team who have worked tirelessly since the inception of the Programme to ensure the Falkland Islands are now safe.

We are pleased that our Falklands Demining programme team will be joining us virtually on Friday at our side event to discuss the methodologies, best practices and lessons learned on this Programme. We hope the knowledge and insight we have gained will contribute to our shared ambition for a mine-free

world by 2025.

Thank you, Mr President.