

Presentation of the Danish request for an extension of the deadline for completing the destruction of anti-personnel mines in accordance with Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention at the 9MSP-Conference in Geneva, November 2008

Mr. President, Co-Presidents, Co-rapporteurs, distinguished delegates, Dear colleagues

Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you upon your election. On behalf of the Danish Government my delegation would like to present a status of the process of clearance of the minefield Skallingen – located on the west coast of the Jutland-peninsula.

Firstly, however, allow me to reiterate Denmark's full commitment to all obligations under the Ottawa Convention. As one of the first countries to ratify the Ottawa Convention, Denmark has pledged itself to work towards securing a world free of anti-personnel mines.

Since 1992 Denmark has donated more than \$200 mill. to mine action activities around the world; making Denmark among the ten largest donors in this field in absolute numbers.

Denmark will continue to support and provide funding for mine action activities and continue to seek international coordination and cooperation within the EU, the UN as well as with NGOs and private sector to mainstream mine action activities.

Returning to the issue of Skallingen, Denmark is fully committed to fulfil its obligations in accordance with Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention. However, the Article 5 deadline for destruction of all anti personnel mines in national minefields expires for Denmark in March 2009. Although a

large part of the originally mine affected area has been cleared and released; total clearance, however, remains to be concluded. Therefore, Denmark is asking for a 22 month extension of the deadline in accordance with Article 5.3 of the Convention.

During the Second World War the Occupying Forces mined the west coast of the Jutland peninsula with approximately 1.5 million mines. Although an huge effort was made to clear mines immediately after the war, Skallingen was never completely cleared and thus never released for public use.

It should be highlighted though that no mine related accidents on Skallingen have been reported since 1946. Furthermore, the negative social and economic impact of the remaining minefield in Skallingen is limited. Tourists and hunters are experiencing some limitations in their usage of the area and local farmers cannot use the area for pasturing. However, there are plenty of local alternatives for these activities.

The environmental impact of the minefield is mostly positive due to restricted human access, while mine clearance is anticipated to have large detrimental impacts on the very fragile and special nature of the area. Restrictions on access have minimized human disturbance to the area for about 50 years, resulting in rare and on a European scale threatened birds breeding in colonies in the mined area.

Mr. President, the report from the Analyzing Group indicates that DK would have been better served by having initiated the clearance at an

earlier stage. We have taken note of this assessment, which we do not intend to challenge.

After a process of interagency coordination the organisational structure of the project was established in 2005. The Ministry of Transport is responsible for clearance activities. The project is organised under the Danish Coastal Authority with the authority to task and coordinate civil contractors.

Mr. President, I will now, with your permission, give the floor to the director of the Danish Coastal Agency, Mr. Jensen.

For operational purposes the mined area was divided into three sub-areas: Area 1 and 2 cover the dynamic beach and dune areas on the west coast of the peninsula, and Area 3 covers the more stable inland marsh and the south coast. It should be noted that with regard to public access, Area 1 and 2 are the most important due to tourism.

In 2005, the Danish Parliament concluded a national political agreement regarding Skallingen allocating approx. \$15 mill. for the release of Area 1 and 2. In 2006 an additional approx. \$6 mill. was allocated.

Since 2006, Denmark has considerably reduced the affected areas:

- The total affected area of the Skallingen Peninsula prior to the project was 255 hectares; 186 hectares of unreleased minefield and

69 hectares of unmined, but adjacent land, which could only be accessed through the minefield.

- Area 1 was cleared by a British contractor in 2006, releasing 19 hectares of beach and dunes.
- Area 2 was cleared by a Danish consortium in 2007-2008, releasing 47 hectares of minefield and facilitating further area reduction of 69 hectares.
- Thus, of the original 255 hectares of mine affected area – now 120 hectares remain to undergo technical surveys during the requested extension period.

The standards and guidelines used at Skallingen are developed for this specific environment and comply with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). To this end, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, GICHD, has been most helpful, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank GICHD for invaluable advice.

As substantiated in our extension request, Denmark is at this point not able to provide a finalized time schedule for the release of area 3 since such a time schedule depends on a variety of factors. These factors to take into consideration are:

Firstly, the decision of timing and method for the release of Area 3 will be based on the experience from Area 1 and 2 and on further investigations of the remaining area, including the condition of the mines and the possible environmental impact on the area.

Secondly, the mined area is part of the internationally famous Waddensee-area. It is designated as a specially protected nature and wildlife area under both the RAMSAR Convention and the European Union's Birds and Habitats Directives. Therefore, the area has the strongest international and national legal protection against activities which may disturb or deteriorate the high natural qualities. The remaining Area 3 is significantly different from Area 1 and 2 because it is mainly marshland, which is more sensitive than area 1 and 2 that mainly consist of beach and dunes.

Thirdly, under Danish law Area 3 will need an Environmental Impact Assessment and thus the process for achieving acceptance from the environmental authorities to activities in the area will have implications on the time schedule.

Fourthly, it has been decided to initiate technical surveys in Area 3 in order to map the extent of the problem. By getting an accurate picture of mine types, mine depths and the present quality of the mines, the clearance methods can be targeted at the exact problem. This will minimize the negative environmental impact, increase the clearance quality and save time and money once clearance commence.

Finally, in addition to the technical and environmental aspects, the mandatory conduct of a public consultation process of relevant interested parties has to be carried out.

When these impeding factors have been clarified, Denmark will be in a position to provide a final time schedule for the release of area 3.

Thus, Denmark is hereby requesting a 22 month extension of its deadline, until 1 January 2011. This extension will allow Denmark to complete a technical survey, an Environmental Impact Assessment and the mandatory public consultations, to develop a release plan for the area which is in compliance with IMAS standards. Once the extent and the implications of the clearance are clarified, the Danish Government will make a decision regarding the release of Area 3.

On this basis, Denmark will then submit an additional request by mid-2010 for the 11th Meeting of the State Parties. This extension request will include a final time schedule and a complete release plan in order to fulfil Denmark's obligations in Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention.

Denmark is committed to provide a status report containing the findings of the preliminary survey to the State Parties within a year after the survey is concluded. The GICHD has been invited to attend the survey of Area 3 and to participate in an advisory role in the planning process regarding the release of this area.

Mr. President, last but not least, we would also like to express our appreciation of His Highness Prince Mired, the Analyzing Group and the Implementation Support Unit for their useful advice and cooperation regarding the Danish extension request.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION