

Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

Statement at the informal meeting of the Open-ended working group (OEWG) on Conventional Ammunition, Third Session

14 February 2023

Statement delivered by Samuel Paunila, Head of AMAT, GICHD

Thank you, Mr Chair,

At the outset, let me congratulate you on the draft document and for steering the work of the OEWG throughout this process.

Since the beginning of the Group of Governmental Experts preceding this OEWG, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has supported the efforts towards a global framework to address existing gaps in to the through-life management of conventional ammunition in all its categories and calibres. Reducing the safety and security risks posed by ammunition is as pertinent as ever in the world we all share today.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

2023 marks the 25th year since the establishment of the GICHD. Evolving with the humanitarian work context, since 2012 the Centre has expanded its strategic focus from landmines and cluster munitions to all types of explosive ordnance, including conventional ammunition.

Institutionally, the GICHD's focus on reducing risks posed by conventional ammunition is reflected in the creation of the Ammunition Management Advisory Team in 2019, as a joint initiative of GICHD and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, in support of the UN SaferGuard Programme.

AMAT works up-stream with national authorities and international and regional partners, providing strategic advice and technical services in ammunition through-life management in different operational contexts, including low-capacity and conflict affected settings.

Our assistance is delivered in line with the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) and corresponding guidelines and standards of good practice.

Mr Chair,

At this stage, I would like to provide brief reflections on the draft document.

We fully support the emphasis in the preamble on the humanitarian, human rights, and socio-economic impact of accidental explosions; and on the role diversion plays in the intensity and duration of armed conflict.

The risks of accidental explosions and diversion of ammunition are higher in low-capacity and conflict affected environments, where they may also carry more severe and long-lasting impact, beyond loss of life and infrastructure.

We therefore welcome the emphasis in Objective 4 a-ii for the coherent integration of through-life ammunition management measures into conflict prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, security sector governance and reform, and sustainable development frameworks, at policy and programme levels.

Mr Chair,

The backbone of effective and sustainable international cooperation and assistance is the existence and application of agreed and relevant standards and norms at the global, regional and national levels.

The GICHD's experience shows that national authorities often find international standards complex and hard to navigate, making them difficult to put into practice. This is especially the case when the relevant technical standards and guidelines are not available in the local language.

Therefore, and as Objective 1 a-iii states, there is a need to make the IATG more readily available, user friendly, and accessible. Moreover, and in line with Objective 1 a-iv, there is a need to expand the IATG to address current and forthcoming security issues through the development of operational guidelines on security aspects of through life management.

With funding from the United Kingdom, and under the UN SaferGuard Programme, AMAT is working towards this objective. The 'Digitised IATG for International Use' project will digitise the entire contents of the IATG – that's 12 volumes, 42 modules – more than 1200 pages in any language.

With the databasing of the IATG and the development of a multi-language application, any technical topic within the IATG can be accessed in seconds, and, for example, comparing a national standard with the internationally agreed good practice will no longer be a daunting task.

Using an innovative combination of artificial intelligence and human translation, our project will also turn the contents of the IATG into Arabic, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian. The digitised IATG application will be publicly available during the spring of 2023.

We hope that the availability of the digital IATG will increase the number of states and institutions using the guidelines and adapting relevant content to national standards and policies.

In section IV, the draft document calls on the Secretariat to establish, under the UN SaferGuard Programme, an efficient and agile global mechanism for requesting, offering and receiving assistance. AMAT is a key output in realising Action 22 of the UN Secretary-General's *Agenda for Disarmament* and acts as the operational arm for the UN SaferGuard Programme.

Besides supporting the review and update of the IATG, AMAT assists the UNODA by operating the UN SaferGuard Quick Response Mechanism (QRM), validating ammunition experts in the IATG and managing the UN SaferGuard expert roster.

The QRM deploys specialists rapidly upon request to reduce risks from conventional ammunition. QRM can activate after a series of accidental explosions such as the 5 March 2021 disaster in Bata, Equatorial Guinea; or in response to a more contained explosion incident such as the one on 5 February in Cusco, Peru.

Mr Chair,

I thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the draft document.

From within the Geneva Centre, my team will continue to support the UN SaferGuard Programme and provide advice and services to states in the safe, secure and sustainable ammunition through-life management.

The GICHD stands ready to support States on the follow up and implementation of the results stemming from the OEWG work.

Thank you.