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**“Humanitarian Demining in Ukraine and its consequences for Food Security”**

New York, 22/02/2024

Excellencies,

Let me first deeply thank Her Excellency Ms. Yulia Svyrydenko and His Excellency Ambassador Massari in his quality of President of the Mine Action Support Group, as well as all the other Member States co-organizing this very important event.

Humanitarian mine action in Ukraine is crucial to my country, as Belgium was the first country in the world to ban the use of anti-personnel mines in 1995. Just like Ukraine, we're an active participant to the Ottawa Convention.

For Belgium, prevention is always key. It starts with fully stopping the production, transfer, stockpiling and use of weapons that are indiscriminate by nature and that jeopardize the safety of civilians, and very often children, long after a conflict is over. Second, we need to further raise awareness about the risks and dangers of explosive ordnance, by ensuring that people most who are the most at risk and the hardest to reach are fully aware of the risks. It is about making sure no one is left behind when looking at mine clearance.

Speakers before me have highlighted the devastating long-term impact that explosive remnants of war have on safety and security and food security in Ukraine, but also economic livelihood and on the environment. The legacy of these inhumane weapons is going to haunt Ukraine for many years to come.

We welcome the progress made by the Ukrainian authorities on coordination between the different instances in charge of demining within Ukraine, as well as the plans to further victim assistance. In order to support the Ukrainian authorities in their efforts to safeguard and protect civilians and the environment, Belgium sent equipment for land and underwater demining and provided the necessary training for the use of this equipment, which has a total value of 6 million EUR. Belgium also contributes to the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund, managed by UN OCHA, used *inter alia* to fund mine action activities. Furthermore, Belgium is currently also exploring further contributions and support to mine action in Ukraine.

Belgium continues to stand by Ukraine and the people of Ukraine and fully supports efforts and initiatives for demining, as a crucial path on the road to reconstruction and recovery.

I thank you.