STATEMENT

by Serhiy SHUTENKO,

Head of the delegation of Ukraine to the Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

(12 – 13 November 2015, Geneva)

Mr. Chair,

Since this is the first time I am taking the floor, I would like to start by extending my warmest congratulations to you on the assumption of your duties and wishing you every success in this endeavor. Please be assured of my delegation’s full support and cooperation with you to advance the objectives of the CCW.

Mr. Chair,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ukraine considers that the presence of mines and other dangerous explosive devices is a direct long-term threat to the civil population, as well as a significant challenge for humanitarian operations. In this regard, our country recognizes and highly values the important role played by the Convention in addressing post-conflict remedial measures in order to minimize the occurrence, risk and effects of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW).

Despite current significant challenges in the security field related to the “hybrid war” waged against Ukraine, our country fully complies with its obligations under this fundamental international document and its Protocols. We take all possible measures to destroy and dispose of ERW from our territory, as foreseen in article 3 of Protocol V of the Convention, appreciating herewith international technical and financial assistance, as well as submit on a regular basis Ukraine’s national annual report on compliance under the CCW.

Fully abiding by its obligations under this Convention, the Ukrainian side has not been producing, procuring, selling to other countries and, accordingly, has not been using and is not planning to use mines and other explosive devices, prohibited by the Convention.

(SLIDE 1) A large part of the territory of Ukraine is contaminated with explosive objects. The most contaminated by explosive items are south-eastern regions of Ukraine; ERW contamination is also detected in Pridneprovsky and central regions. On the territory of Ukraine there are 32 former military firing grounds with a total area of about 150 thousand hectares (1 thousand. 500 sq. km), and sites contaminated with explosive items of the past world wars.

(SLIDE 2) As of today, units of the State Emergency Service have cleared over 8800 hectares of territory and 40 hectares of water in eastern Ukraine; approximately 1000 social infrastructure facilities, including over 100 schools have been inspected in regards to mines and other explosive devices. As a result of these operations – over 40000 ERW, including more than 630 especially dangerous booby traps, heavy demolition munitions, improvised explosive devices and remote controlled blasting equipment, deliberately installed by Russia-backed terrorists and illegal armed groups in violation of Protocol II of the CCW, have been destroyed.

Mr. Chair,

Because of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation and Russia-backed illegal armed groups, operating in the Southeast of our country, new areas contaminated with dangerous explosive devices appear on a daily basis. In this regard we have to deal with a
drastically increased number of dangerous ERW, causing severe casualties among civilians, including children. These explosive remnants which have indiscriminate effect have been left by illegal armed groups in residential areas and routes of communication between inhabited localities in violation of the CCW, which poses more threat to the civilian population than to military personnel. In particular, this issue has been reflected in paragraph 67 of the recent 11th Report prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the basis of findings of the UN Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

The territory, occupied by Russian-backed terrorist groups, on which active hostilities took place beginning from May 2014, is approximately 15,800 sq. km. Taking also into account the territories controlled by the Ukrainian authorities, which were shelled by terrorists, the total area where ERW might be found is approximately 21,500 sq. km.

(SLIDE 3) We remain concerned about the fate of antipersonnel mines, which were stored in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, illegally annexed and currently occupied by the Russian Federation. We have some evidence that these OZM-4’s from the depot in Crimea might be used by Russia-backed terrorists to create improvised explosive devices, which they subsequently plant in the southeast of our country.

With the aim of providing social protection to all suffering citizens of Ukraine, who became victims of explosive devices, the Ukrainian government adopted a Programme of psychological rehabilitation, professional training (retraining) for disabled people (amputees). This year, according to the relevant Presidential Decree, it is foreseen to provide assistance to 4500 victims of landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Yet, there is still much to be done, since the challenges Ukraine faces nowadays are, unfortunately, far greater.

While relative calm has been observed in Donbas since the beginning of September, which we welcome, we remain concerned that the militants’ armed provocations continue, leading to new areas contaminated with ERW and, consequently, more human losses and destruction. According to the latest information, Russia-backed illegal armed groups in the southeast of our country actively attempt using various types of booby-traps to mine adjacent to the contact line areas and routes.

Minefields and groups of mines, installed by terrorists constitute another great threat, first of all, to the civil population. In most cases these mines are installed unsystematically, information about mines is not recorded, barriers are not installed, contrary to the international law.

(SLIDE 4) Improvised explosive devices pose the most threat to civil population of occupied and liberated territories of the southeast of Ukraine, which terrorists leave behind not only in buildings and paths used by the anti-terrorist operation forces, but also in places of possible gathering of people in order to wreak havoc among them. Household items, explosive substances used for mining operations, as well as unexploded ammunition are used in their production.

(SLIDE 5) The most cynical case with which Ukrainian field engineers had to deal with are improvised explosive devices, hidden in children’s toys.

(SLIDE 6) There were 542 victims of mines in Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine in 2014 – 2015, including:
- 15 children (8 in 2014, 7 in 2015);
- 55 civilians (6 in 2014, 49 in 2015);
- 472 servicemen (169 in 2014, 303 in 2015);
- 127 of them have died (32 in 2014, 95 in 2015).

Quoting UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s remarks at the press encounter with Peter Maurer, ICRC President, on a joint call for protection of civilians on October 31, “In Ukraine combatants and those who control them are defying humanity’s most basic rules”.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,
The Ukrainian side believes it is of utmost importance that all parties take every effort to ensure proper implementation of the CCW and its additional Protocols. Alongside, due attention should be paid to those states, where the need for elimination of explosive devices is the top priority. In this regard Ukraine highly values the assistance already provided by our international partners in this field, including France, Germany, the Netherlands, UK and the USA, as well as international organizations, such as NATO, OSCE and others, in performing a large range of much needed demining and clearance operations in the southeast of Ukraine.

Since July 6, 2014 the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, in close cooperation with OSCE, NATO, the UN Mine Action Service, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Swiss Foundation for Mine Action and Danish Demining Group, has been actively engaged in performing a range of demining actions on the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions liberated from the control of Russia-backed terrorists. I cannot omit mentioning as well UNICEF’s mine-risk education campaign providing some 500 000 Ukrainian children and their families in conflict-affected areas with lifesaving information about the risks posed by mines and explosives. We highly appreciate the engagement of the ICRC, among other actions, in running mine awareness training for volunteers from the Ukrainian Red Cross and the State Emergency Service, equipping them with protective demining tools and placing signs marking off areas where there are mines and unexploded munitions to ensure the safety of civilians.

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished delegates,

In order to ensure security of civilians, stable functioning of infrastructure and safe conduction of demining operations Ukraine highly relies on intensified cooperation with the worldwide community, first of all in the field of sharing experience on existing ERW detection and destruction technologies, as well as technical and financial assistance to upgrade our field engineers with necessary modern gear.

We would appreciate any possible engagement of the donor community in meeting those needs and are ready to provide additional information regarding current issues in the field of humanitarian demining in Ukraine.

Mr. Chair,
The delegation of Ukraine looks forward to productive and fruitful discussions, and is ready for joint efforts to achieve a successful outcome of the Conference.
I thank you.