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FY 2027 Public Witness Testimony for the House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs

The Department of State Conventional Weapons Destruction Program

The HALO Trust (USA) submits this testimony as the world's largest humanitarian demining and weapons security organization, and as a partner of the U.S. State and War Departments in addressing the threat that landmines, other explosives, and insecure weapons pose to global and national security, as well as to human lives and livelihoods. HALO is an implementing partner of the State Department's Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) program and works in 30 countries and territories with a staff of approximately 10,000. Given the urgent need for increased global demining efforts, **we respectfully request that Congress appropriate \$271.703 million for the State Department Conventional Weapons Destruction account, including \$80 million for programs in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam** in the FY27 National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs (NSRP) Appropriations Report.

As you know, the Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) account funds State Department humanitarian demining, explosive risk education, and weapons security programs in roughly 30 countries. These programs are managed by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Political-Military Affairs Bureau at the State Department and address the impacts of landmines, improvised explosive devices, and other explosive remnants of war, while supporting allied security forces in combating the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons systems.

As the world experiences heightened levels of conflict, CWD programs have never been more critical. In Gaza, where HALO has already identified more than 60 types of explosive weapons, demining must occur to enable reconstruction, to support human security, and prevent Hamas from continuing to harvest explosives for use against Israel. In Syria, further expanding CWD efforts throughout the country can support stability, prevent ISIS from accessing explosive hazards and unsecure weapons, and provide safe access for inspectors to access the former regime's chemical weapons which are surrounded by and stored amongst conventional weapons. Demining programs will support Syria's transition to democratic governance and help strengthen their efforts to counter ISIS. In Ukraine, a quarter of the country is still suspected to contain landmine contamination, keeping large swathes of farmland out of use – impeding their ability to continue countering Russia. Mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) have also already caused more than 2,200 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion. Demining and explosive risk education efforts are also needed in Burma, which continues to rank highest in the world for civilian casualties from explosive hazards. In Sudan, new CWD support will be needed to address contamination from decades of conflict, and open aid routes to provide greatly needed humanitarian relief.

Meanwhile, the U.S. must continue to invest in the post-conflict recovery of countries such as Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia which remain heavily impacted by U.S. cluster bombs and other explosive hazards from the Vietnam War-era. Here, unexploded munitions create barriers to development and food security. Cambodia also contains extensive mine contamination, and the

presence of UXO has grown due to the recent border conflicts with Thailand. CWD investment in the Pacific Islands, such as the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Kiribati will help eliminate WWII US legacy contamination still causing casualties 80 years later. Additionally, in Angola, where the host government has already provided over \$60 million to partner with the U.S. on demining, CWD efforts are enabling the creation of an ecotourism industry in the southeast region, while ensuring the success of the Lobito Corridor project which will help provide the U.S. with access to natural resources. Removing explosives planted in Colombia supports stability, prosperity, and peace. Lastly, continued investment in Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe will ensure these countries can become mine-impact free in a few short years.

Increasing investment in CWD programs has clear humanitarian benefits such as saving lives, enabling freedom of movement, permitting safe access to farmland, water, and health facilities, ensuring parents do not need to worry about the well-being of their playing children, and saving lives. According to the latest Landmine Monitor Report, nearly 6,300 people were killed or injured by explosives in 2024, the highest rate since 2020. Roughly 90% of these casualties were civilians, and nearly 50% were children.¹ Countless lives and limbs can be saved by increasing support for CWD programs.

In addition to these benefits, CWD programs classified as International Security Assistance programs due to their impact making America safer. Mines and UXO don't just harm civilians in other countries, they also threaten U.S. troops, embassy staff, and other Americans working in or visiting current or former conflict zones. In addition, lessons learned from demining programs, which benefit from equipment provided by the US Department of War, inform designs for new and improved mine detection systems to protect American warfighters. Finally, CWD programs help keep weapons out of the hands of criminal gangs who operate across borders, fuel violence, and drive migration. In Latin America, where drug trafficking and armed violence rates remain extremely high, CWD programs including in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, help prevent the leakage of weapons from government stockpiles to gangs and cartels.

CWD programs make America stronger. These programs build security partnerships across the Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and Africa, where the U.S. is competing with China and Russia for access and influence. They also project American soft power, as explosive ordnance removal provides a direct and measurable benefit to large swathes of the population, while the US flags worn on the body armor of deminers and displayed on their vehicles provide a highly visible demonstration of American support in areas of strategic competition.

CWD programs make America more prosperous. By making unusable land safe, CWD programs help drive down the price of food worldwide by opening up agricultural land and enabling countries to access to natural resources, while transforming conflict impacted countries from foreign aid recipients into markets for American companies. Implementing partners like HALO also utilize equipment from American companies such as John Deere and Caterpillar to support American industry.

Lastly, CWD programs create leverage. For every dollar of US Government funding, HALO has been able to mobilize two more dollars from other countries, corporations, foundations and philanthropists.

We are extremely grateful for this Subcommittee's longstanding commitment to the Conventional Weapons Destruction account, and to Congress for ensuring the U.S. continues to lead the world in support for CWD efforts. This year, 149 total bipartisan House Members signed a letter co-led by Representatives Chrissy Houlahan and Young Kim, supporting global demining programs at the levels requested in this testimony. These levels also match the allocations in the FY26 House NSRP Report. We are also pleased to see continued prioritization of CWD programs by this Administration.

As conflict abroad increases the need for stability, security, and the removal of explosive hazards to protect civilians and US forces, and as the US reduces other forms of assistance, increased investments in CWD programs will deliver tangible and lasting results, and ensure the US is strengthening engagement with its allies. For these reasons, we respectfully encourage the NSRP Subcommittee to appropriate \$271.703 million for the Conventional Weapons Destruction account, including \$80 million for programs in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. We greatly appreciate your consideration of this request.

ⁱ International Campaign to Ban Landmines – Cluster Munition Coalition. (2025). *Landmine monitor 2025*. Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor.
<https://icblcmc.org/assets/reports/Landmine-Monitors/LMM2025/Downloads/Landmine-Monitor-2025-Final-Online-updated.pdf>