Madam President,

Let me first congratulate you for your appointment to the Presidency of this 17th Meeting of States Parties of the APMBC. Belgium assures you of its full support and active cooperation.

My delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered by the European Union and wishes to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

Belgium remains strongly committed to our common objective of a world free of antipersonnel mines by 2025, but also a world free of new or unassisted mine victims. In this respect, we are gravely concerned by the dramatically high number of mine and ERW casualties that have been recorded since 2015. As reported by the Landmine Monitor 2018, this high figure is mainly caused by the heavy dissemination of improvised mines, particularly in Afghanistan and Syria, that prevents the safe return of IDPs and hinders the reconstruction of whole regions. Belgium condemns the use by anyone - state or non-state actors - of antipersonnel mines, including of an improvised nature. In this regard, Belgium welcomes the effort of updating the International Mine Action Standards in order to effectively address the clearance and removal of improvised anti-personnel mines.

My Country urges all States Parties to step up their efforts to fulfill their obligations under the Convention ahead of the 4th Review Conference under the Presidency of Norway in 2019.

(Art. 5 Extension Requests)

Belgium welcomes the fact that Ukraine has submitted an extension request of its deadline to meet its obligations under article 5.1. We understand the extremely difficult situation Ukraine is faced with, which impedes on its ability to destroy all anti-personnel landmines in mined areas reported to be under its jurisdiction or control. However, the Convention foresees provisions for such a situation, which allow a State Part to remain in compliance with its obligations.
Therefore, while we highly appreciate that Ukraine has submitted an extension request, we are concerned that it did not act in accordance with the “process for the preparation, submission and consideration of requests for extension to article 5 deadlines”, which was agreed upon at the Seventh Meeting of States Parties. We also regret the late submission of the request by Ukraine, which did not permit for a more extended cooperative dialogue between the Committee on Article 5 Implementation and Ukraine. This is a critical part of the process and one which represents the cooperative spirit of the Convention. We encourage Ukraine to remain engaged with the Article 5 Committee and to ensure accurate reporting on the challenges faced and the progress made.

*(victim assistance segment)*

Madam President,

Belgium would like to thank all members of the Committee on Victim Assistance – Croatia, Mozambique, and Ecuador – for their active engagement in the work of the Committee this year. We would also like to warmly thank the ISU for their valued support to the Committee’s work.

My country also expresses its appreciation to the States Parties that have submitted updated information on progress in implementing their victim assistance commitments under the Convention. As reported by the Chair, with 24 out of 29 States Parties having submitted information on victim assistance efforts this year, we are getting closer to fulfilling our objective of 100% reporting rate. We urge the remaining non-reporting States to consider reporting next year.

Madam President,

Belgium was a pioneer in the fight against anti-personnel mines and our commitment to the Ottawa Convention remains unwavering, both in political as well as financial terms.

The significant rise in the number of mine victims over the last years demonstrates, with increasing urgency, the need to step up our national and international efforts for the well-being of mine victims and their communities. Victim assistance has too often been regarded a “secondary” pillar of mine action. By chairing the Committee on Victim Assistance this year, our objective was thus to advance victim assistance and to raise awareness on the needs and rights of mine victims to ensure their full, equal and effective participation in society.
We are pleased that the Committee on Victim Assistance this year adopted an **ambitious work plan** focusing, among other objectives, on reinforcing the cooperation with key partners from the disarmament, health, human rights and disability sectors, and on increasing the link between victim assistance, gender and the SDGs (under the “no one left behind” umbrella). We would like to express our deep appreciation to all the partners who actively worked with the Committee this year to promote the needs and rights of mine victims.

My country also deemed it important to reinforce the Committee’s support to affected States. As reported in the Landmine Monitor 2018, most States with a significant number of mine victims still lack suitable resources and practices to fulfill the commitments they have made under the Maputo Action Plan. In most States, access to rehabilitation services, in particular in remote areas, remains a serious challenge and less than 50% of affected States have relevant victim assistance and disability plans in place. This is the reason why the Committee is launching, with the financial support of Belgium and the sponsorship program, a “**Victim Assistance Experts Meeting**” that will kick off tomorrow. We would like to warmly thank the experts from affected States that have already registered for this important event and encourage those who have not registered yet to join us tomorrow.

Madam President,

My country continues to **plead for the inclusion**, and the full, equal, and effective participation of mine victims and their representative organizations in society through direct support and the mainstreaming of victim assistance in national policies, plans and legal frameworks.

Belgium deems it important to **act together**, to enable the victims to become actors of their own development through the integration of victim assistance in the broader policy framework of our Convention, of other relevant conventions, but also in the context of the human rights and the sustainable development goals (SDGs). In the affected countries, mine action is key to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **Gender mainstreaming** is another important horizontal priority in mine action. We thus positively welcome the attention attached to gender and the SDGs by the Committee this year. In this regard, we welcome the release, with the support of Italy, of the new “**Operational Guidance for Victim Assistance Responsive to Gender and Other Diversity Aspects**” in June.

Finally, Belgium calls for **victim assistance to remain at the heart** of the Convention as a **core engagement** of all State Parties but also as one of our highest priorities in mine
action. We urge all States Parties to step up their efforts in this regard ahead of the Fourth Review Conference next year.

(Cooperation and Assistance segment)

Belgium fully supports the “Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance” in its efforts to assist States Parties in the implementation of their obligations under the Convention, particularly through its individualized approach. We welcome the organization by the Committee of individualized approach events with Zimbabwe, Somalia, and Angola during this 17th Meeting of States Parties.

My country would also like to thank the Committee for its active engagement during the “Victim Assistance Retreat” organized by the Committee on Victim Assistance earlier this year and for its interest in organising a possible “individualized approach event” tailored for victim assistance next year. In this regard, Belgium calls on all States interested in such a “victim assistance-focused individualized approach” event, in the margins of the MSP in November, to reach out to both Committees for further information.

Belgium reiterates its financial commitment to the objectives of the Convention. It supports projects in the sector of mine clearance, mine risk education, advocacy and, of course, victim assistance.

In 2017, Belgium contributed nearly a million EUR to projects related to mine clearance, mine risk education, advocacy, and victim assistance in Myanmar, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palau. My country also financed global programs of Humanity and Inclusion (Handicap International) and ICRC appeals containing mine action activities in various countries.

In 2018, Belgium has contributed 60,000 EUR to ICBL-CMC to promote advocacy, victim assistance, and research in affected countries, 150,000 EUR to APOPO for survey and clearance of the Preah Vihear site in Cambodia, 150,000 EUR to Halo Trust for humanitarian mine clearance in Ukraine, 150,000 EUR to MAG for a mixed small arms and light weapons and explosive remnants of war awareness raising project in Mali, 150,000 EUR for Humanity and Inclusion (Handicap International) for victim assistance and clearance in Colombia and 500,000 EUR to the ICRC’s mine action program in Irak. A contribution of 150,000 EUR to Halo Trust for survey and mine risk education in Syria is also under review after developments in the field.

Belgium attaches specific attention to the promotion of innovation in humanitarian work. This year Humanity & Inclusion (Handicap International) received 1,5 million EUR
for a project directed at accelerating land release for the local Chadian population with the help of drone-led survey techniques. In 2017, the same organization was given 700,000 EUR to implement a project of 3D prostheses printing in Africa (through the African Organization for the Development of Centers for Disabled People).

(Unevaluation segment)

Belgium commend the presidency’s active engagement to promote the universalization of the Convention. My country appreciates the quality and relevance of the report that has been produced by the Afghan residency. We also want to pay tribute to the Special Envoy, HRH Prince Mired, for his tireless efforts in favor of universalization. As he clearly demonstrated in his statement, efforts towards universalization raise awareness at the highest level in States where the Mine Ban Convention is not high enough on the political agenda. We also endorse his recommendation that all States Parties play their part in promoting universalization. As we move towards the review Conference next year, we believe States Parties should give consideration to ways to enhance our collective commitment. In this regard, consideration could be given to turning the ad hoc working group on universalization into a formal standing committee of the Convention.

Finally, Belgium aligns itself fully with the statement delivered by the European Union and underscores the contribution given by the EU Council decision in support of the implementation of the Maputo Action Plan to the efforts of the Presidency and the high-level task force with the support of the MSU.

(Finances and ISU segment)

Belgium welcomes the efficient implementation of the decision on strengthening financial governance and transparency within the ISU adopted by the 14th MSP, which this year allowed the ISU to strengthen its capacities as part of the enhanced support budget line. We support a further extension of these strengthened capacities for 2019. We also support the proposed increase by 1.5% in salaries for the ISU staff in 2019.

With regard to the financial situation of the Convention, we are concerned about the arrears by a number of States which has led to the shortening to 4 days of this 17th Meeting of States Parties and to the adoption of further cost-cutting measures for the third year in a row. This should not become a practice. Payment of contributions is testimony to each State Party’s commitment to the objective and goal of the Convention. My country urges all States Parties to honor their financial obligations
without delay so we can recover sound finances for the Convention as well as to provide adequate financing for the ISU on a voluntary basis.

I thank you.