



**PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION  
FOR  
AMMENDING AN EXISTING INTERNATIONAL MINE ACTION STANDARD,  
DEVELOPING A NEW STANDARD,  
OR  
A NEW TECHNICAL NOTE FOR MINE ACTION**

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This form is intended to provide the start point in a process that identifies both shortcomings and improvements needed in International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and their accompanying Technical Notes on Mine Action (TNMA).

After it has been properly completed and submitted, the proposal will be reviewed by the Chairman and the Secretary of the IMAS Review Board who will then include their comments, if any, and circulate it to the Review Board. If there is support for the proposal from at least 25% of the Review Board's members the process will continue.

Note 1: When the Review Board supports the subject matter, the proposal for a new IMAS will be submitted to the IMAS Steering Group for approval.

Note 2: In the event of amendments to an existing IMAS, this form will only be used when the amendments are substantial (e.g. NMAA and Mine Action Organizations may need to amend their National Standards and/or SOPs).

Note 3: When the Review Board cannot agree on a proposal, the issue will be put to the IMAS Steering Group for a final decision.

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APOPO, NPA, DDG, DCA, MAG, HI and GICHD (Land Release Section) wish to propose that the following is considered within the framework of International Mine Action Standards:

**Full revision of the IMAS series on land release**

The IMAS series on land release is typically seen as the framework for the implementation of a much wider group of IMAS standards. These standards are now the most important operational framework for many operators. While they have had a significant impact on global practices of releasing land, a two-year field application of the Land Release IMAS has also revealed some issues that cause confusion and prevent a coherent interpretation.

In August 2011 APOPO, NPA, DDG, DCA, MAG and the GICHD (Land Release Unit) conducted a small workshop on land release. HI was not present but has since endorsed the conclusions from the meeting. Topics for discussion included IMAS and the general field application of land release principles. All participating NGOs agreed that there is an urgent need to revise the current IMAS standards on land release to reflect a more uniform interpretation of land release principles including more appropriate classification of land and associated terminologies. This would also assist the comparison of statistics for survey and clearance activities which are frequently recorded differently by organizations and country programmes. We therefore request that the IMAS series on land release be revised as soon as possible. Below is a more detailed reason for requesting the revision:

### **Terminology in general**

There is confusion with regard to terminology, some that has been poorly defined and some that is missing or misleading. While IMAS talks about the difference between land release and land cancellation, the definition of land cancellation has not been included while the term is used frequently throughout the documents. There is a need to redefine some of the terminology in order to clarify references to land release and cancellation.

### **Defined Hazardous Area (DHA)**

The term Defined Hazardous Area (DHA), has caused confusion. While some consider it a measurement of the areas that have actually been cleared and acknowledge that a DHA can only be reported after the survey and clearance operation has been completed, others tend to look at it as something that can and should be defined before clearance is undertaken. The term is however not used widely and may not be needed in the land release process. Its removal from the IMAS should be considered.

### **Land classification**

The IMAS series on land release links land classification with the type of mine action activity. Confirmed Hazardous Area (CHA) is for example the product of a non-technical survey while Defined Hazardous Area (DHA) is the product of technical survey. The field application of these standards suggests that this is the wrong approach.

A NTS is not always of high quality, frequently due to lack of information and is often followed by further NTS activities. Indeed, NTS activities should remain on-going through the life of a programme. Yet, IMAS proposes the product of NTS to be the creation of CHA. In many cases the areas should remain as SHA even after a NTS or, in part or fully, be classified as Area With Restrictions (AWR – see paragraph below) if every effort has been made to complete a detailed NTS but the survey failed to provide sufficient details about the potential contamination. The greatest step forward in many countries would be the differentiation between SHA, AWR and CHA. For instance, rather than say a nation has 300km<sup>2</sup> of hazardous area it may be clarified as say, 50km<sup>2</sup> of SHA, 200 km<sup>2</sup> of AWR and 50km<sup>2</sup> of CHA – this would provide greater clarification for Conventions and would represent much better the actual understanding of the problem. The IMAS should thus promote such a three-tier system.

Moreover, it is common to combine NTS with TS to enhance the quality output of the survey process. In this role the TS does not intend to define the detailed parameters of the mined areas but rather to minimize the parameters of the CHA. In other words, the intention is to enhance the outcome from the NTS. Reporting becomes difficult when combined surveys are undertaken and land classification is linked to individual elements of the survey. IMAS today looks upon technical survey as an activity that is linked to clearance and whose sole purpose is to define the detailed parameters of areas to be cleared. But technical survey has a much wider function and is equally linked to the non-technical survey. Products of different elements of the survey process thus need to be reviewed and addressed.

### **Interplay with the APMBC**

While IMAS is not directly linked to the APMBC there is a relationship between the aims of the treaty, the operational challenge for mine affected countries and the proposed methodology in IMAS. The treaty makes reference to IMAS and vice versa. The treaty calls for every effort to identify where mines are and the full removal of these mines by subsequent survey and clearance. The operational meaning of “every effort” has not been appropriately defined and State Parties, as well as operators, struggle to properly define the scope of the mine problem and thus what State Parties should report on and address within the context of the treaty. The term “every effort” should imply a quality process to identify mined areas.

### **Suspect Hazardous Areas and Areas With Restrictions (AWR)**

IMAS proposes that land is cancelled/released or recorded as Confirmed Hazardous Areas from a non-technical survey. Experience from several countries highlights a weakness in this approach since the survey will face situations where every effort has been made to conduct the survey but there was a shortage of information or access to certain areas that may be large uninhabited (or scarcely habited) forest- or wasteland. There is thus a risk of mines that goes beyond the risk that we normally accept when we cancel or release land. The risk in such cases may be localized but cannot be identified within a vast expanse of land and may not be definable through any reasonable approaches. The IMAS should better reflect this situation and allow NTS activities to differentiate between SHA and CHA and where appropriate, introduce a classification of Area with Restriction. For the latter, IMAS should further provide guidelines as to what would be appropriate restrictions.

### **Conclusion**

The IMAS series on land release should be revised. IMAS should provide a logical framework for the principles of land release, including the interlinked classification and re-classification of land and the use of appropriate globalised terminology. While the current version of IMAS is valuable we feel that there is an urgent need for improvement and that a properly revised version of the IMAS series could clarify issues related to the treaty and promote improved and more efficient field application of land release principles. The following adjustments should be considered:

- IMAS should further clarify the basic principle of classifying land. The current IMAS series states that a DHA is a product of TS and a CHA is a product of NTS. It is proposed that the term DHA be removed from the IMAS and that the process by which a CHA is defined is reviewed.
- The current IMAS states that a NTS, either cancels/releases land and creates a CHA from a SHA or reduces the area an existing CHA. If information on a SHA remains vague however and criteria are not met to warrant creation of a CHA during a NTS then the area should remain a SHA. There is growing agreement on a further land classification, which could be labeled 'Area With Restrictions' - replacing SHA in many cases. An IMAS revision process should examine this option and, if found appropriate, include it in the revised IMAS.
- There is inconsistent use of the terms land cancellation and land release and the definition of land cancellation is completely missing. A revised IMAS should clarify this issue and provide appropriate definitions of terminology.

There is thus no need for a major revision to the Land Release IMAS series but rather one that systematically addresses the issues referred to above. We propose that the IMAS review board appoint one person to lead the revision and that a small User Focus Group meet at least once, possibly twice, to discuss the drafts that are produced. A final draft will subsequently be presented to the IMAS review board for consideration.

## ANNEX A

**Summary and recommendations resulting of above proposal:** *(To be prepared by the Secretary or the Chair of the IMAS Review Board)*

**Date Received:** 25 October 2011

**Action:** The proposal has been supported by members of the IMAS Review Board and review and revision of the land release IMAS underway.