

Launch- APPG Explosive Weapons & Their Impact

It is truly wonderful to see so much support from the commercial sector here tonight.

Your expertise and commitment to explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) are invaluable, and I look forward to learning more about the incredible work you do over the coming year.

This evening, we are not only launching the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Explosive Weapons & Their Impact – we are also announcing the start of our first inquiry. This inquiry will examine UK PLC's capability and role in supplying EOD equipment and training.

Over the next couple of weeks, we will be drawing up the terms of reference for this inquiry, and I have no doubt that many of you will wish to submit evidence. Your input will be crucial in shaping our understanding of the UK's strengths and limitations in this field.

Throughout the year, we will also be addressing a range of pressing issues within the EOD agenda. One critical area of focus will be our counterterrorism response, ensuring that we remain at the forefront of tackling threats both at home and abroad. Another key area of interest is EOD in the aquatic environment, where the challenges of clearance and disposal present unique difficulties that require innovative solutions. We will also be examining the issue from a geographical perspective, particularly in those countries where the UK has an existing EOD footprint.

Most importantly, this APPG will serve as a forum for robust discussions on policy. We will be holding a number of events over the coming year to explore where the UK EOD community sits in the fast-evolving global landscape, and how we can ensure that we are providing the necessary support to those affected by explosive weapons.

The United Kingdom's capacity in explosive weapons disposal and victim assistance requires the utmost Government support, particularly in these times of extreme geopolitical unrest. As these conflicts continue, they will inevitably lead to an overwhelming need for explosive weapons disposal expertise once any form of peace begins to take hold.

Explosive weapons are being used in modern conflicts at a level not seen for generations. The human toll is staggering. In the past three years alone, we have seen a 70% increase in civilian casualties, with the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East being the primary causes. To put this into stark perspective, Ukraine now has more amputees than the UK has military personnel. This is a sobering reality and underscores the urgency of our work.

It is particularly poignant that we are gathered here today, on the third anniversary since the war in Ukraine began. The devastation caused by explosive weapons in Ukraine cannot be overstated, and the scale of contamination is unprecedented. Once the war is over, Ukraine will face an immense challenge in clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance. It will take decades to make the land safe again, and the UK must play a leading role in that effort.

The UK has a proud history of leadership in banning indiscriminate weapons. In 1999, we were among the first signatories of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, also known as the Ottawa Convention. This was followed in 2010 by the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Neither Russia nor the United States signed either convention, but Ukraine did. Our moral and strategic commitment to supporting Ukraine in clearing landmines and

explosive remnants of war is clear, and we must ensure that we stand by that commitment.

The task ahead is vast, but the UK is in a strong position to make a meaningful impact. Through this APPG, we will work to ensure that the UK remains at the forefront of explosive weapons disposal and victim assistance. We will champion the expertise of our EOD community, advocate for the necessary resources and policy support, and contribute to global efforts to mitigate the horrific impact of explosive weapons on civilians.

I want to thank you all for being here tonight and for your commitment to this vital work.

Together, we can help shape a future where the devastating consequences of explosive weapons are addressed with the urgency and dedication they demand.

Thank you.