

**Chris Whatley, Executive Director, The HALO Trust (USA)**

**FY 2026 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**

Good morning, I'm Chris Whatley, executive director of The HALO Trust (USA). As a representative of the world's largest humanitarian demining and weapons security organization with operations in over 30 countries, and a partner of the State and Defense Departments, I am honored to join you today to speak to the importance of the State Department Conventional Weapons Destruction program and encourage the NSRP Appropriations subcommittee include **no less than \$290 million for the Conventional Weapons Destruction account in the FY26 budget.**

With HALO, I have walked alongside our local staff in the Solomon Islands who proudly wear U.S. flags on their gear while locating WWII ordnance that still threaten civilians. I have seen my brave Ukrainian colleagues clear farmland so Ukraine can fund its own defense and feed the world; and I have seen how improving the security of military armories in El Salvador and Honduras keeps weapons out of the hands of transnational criminal gangs. With every visit, I am reminded of the important role that these U.S. international security assistance programs play in not only supporting the recovery of some of the world's most vulnerable populations, but also in **making America safer, stronger, and more prosperous.**

As you know, the Conventional Weapons Destruction (CWD) account funds State Department humanitarian landmine removal and weapons security programs in nearly 50 countries. These programs address the impacts of landmines, improvised explosive devices, and other explosive remnants of war, while supporting allied security forces to combat the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons systems. The stated goals of CWD programs are to:

1. Enhance U.S. and international security by destroying and safeguarding small arms and light weapons, including MANPADS, at risk of proliferation to criminals, terrorists, and other violent non-state actors,
2. Improve stability and prosperity by clearing landmines and explosive remnants of war and returning land to productive use, and,
3. Build trust and deepen relationships with key partners to speed achievement of broader U.S. foreign policy objectives.

**CWD programs make America safer.** Not only do landmines and other victim operated munitions kill civilians in other countries, they also threaten U.S. troops, Embassy staff, and other Americans working in past or present conflict zones. In addition, lessons learned from demining programs, which benefit from equipment provided by the US Department of Defense, are used to design new and better mine detection systems to protect American warfighters in the future. Finally, CWD programs help keep weapons out of the hands of criminal gangs who operate across borders, fuel violence, and drive migration. In Somalia, as Al-Shabaab gains ground, CWD programs are essential to removing access to explosive materials and weapons,

including shoulder-fired rockets that can target U.S. and our allies' aircraft.

**CWD programs make America stronger.** These programs build security partnerships across the Asia-Pacific, Latin America, and Africa, where the US is competing with China 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.** When Russia invaded grain-rich Ukraine, seeding a land area as large as the state of Florida with deadly explosives, the price of vegetable oil for Americans shot up by as much as 50%. By making unusable land safe, CWD programs help drive down the price of food worldwide and enable countries to access to natural resources, while transforming conflict impacted countries from foreign aid recipients into markets for American companies.

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.

Given the importance of CWD programs, and at a time when conflicts raging around the world are causing hundreds of casualties every week, **we recommend that the NSRP Appropriations subcommittee include no less than \$290 million for the Conventional Weapons Destruction account in the FY26 budget.**

Demining and weapons security programs save lives, support stability, promote development, enable food security, and counter terrorism, while reinforcing U.S. leadership. These programs have tangible and measurable results and have long enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress and throughout Republican and Democratic Administrations, including under the first Trump Administration.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the great value of CWD programs, and I am happy to answer any questions.