

Speech by Major General James Cowan, HALO Chief Executive

Your Royal Highness, Ministers, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening. We live in an age of man-made crisis. Across the world, war displaces people and causes untold suffering. But after the fighting stops, landmines, IEDs and other weapons paralyse countries.

What HALO does is really very simple: we stop people from being killed. HALO cleared nearly 50,000 mines and IEDs last year – that's 50,000 that won't kill and maim. We create work: HALO employs nearly 7,000 deminers – that's 30,000 people dependent on a living from demining. We restore land for farming and other livelihoods. And we restore confidence in countries devastated by war.

I would like to thank The Mines Advisory Group and Norwegian People's Aid – HALO, MAG and NPA are not just colleagues but friends, powerful humanitarians, better together than apart. Secondly, I thank our trustees, British and American, whose unpaid time and talent are too rarely acknowledged.

Thirdly, we cannot succeed without our donors. So I would especially like to thank Priti Patel, Rory Stewart and the British officials who have made tonight possible. With Britain stand others: notably our most generous supporter the United States, and Canada, The Netherlands, Norway and Ireland whose ministers join us tonight – but many others such as the UN, EU, Germany, Japan, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Italy, show what can be done and deserve our thanks.

But with governments, we need new partnerships such as the one we have recently agreed with the Italian energy company Eni; or the generous grant from an anonymous American foundation matching all funds for Karabakh and Kosovo. I should also thank numerous other donors, some of whom are with us tonight: the Caerus Foundation, the Disney-Miller family; the JDK Trust, Julia and Hans Rausing, the Gould Foundation, and the SJS Charitable Trust.

Finally, I should like to thank Your Royal Highness. Sir, your mother gave extraordinary impetus in 1997; your advocacy today lends equal weight in 2017. There are too many countries in the world still in the shadow of bygone wars. Many others live with new conflict and the weapons, such as IEDs, with which they are fought. It is possible to change this.

As with smallpox, a mine free world is not a pipe dream but a real possibility, but only with the right support. So tonight, as we remember the work of Diana, Princess of Wales, and in the presence of her son, a glimmer of hope is presented to unite government, corporate and private donors and start the countdown to a mine free world.

I therefore urge you all to join the British government in their generosity, to forge new partnerships, and to walk alongside our brave de-miners. Together, we can make 2025 the year the world became mine-free. And with those deminers in mind, please join me in applauding their brave work. Without them, none of this would be possible.