



UN mine service considers new ways to clear land more effectively

17 April 2008 –The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) says it is considering the introduction of new and more efficient methods of checking land for mines that could drastically speed up the clearance of land in mine-affected regions for use by local communities.

Deminers currently use detectors to comb all land suspected of being hazardous, even when there is no credible evidence of landmines in the area. This process can be so slow that many countries affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war struggle to reach their targets of clearing land.

But John Flanagan, the officer-in-charge of UNMAS in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), yesterday told a conference on demining in Sibenik, Croatia, that a review of standard procedures would allow mine clearance equipment to be focused more on areas that actually do contain mines and explosive hazards.

"We're looking for ways to confirm that land is safe without necessarily going over every inch of it with a mine detector," he said. "Where there is a genuine threat, however, we will make sure all landmines and explosive remnants of war are removed before we tell a community that land is safe for their use."

A recent report by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining found that "general assessments and landmine impact surveys often overestimate the extent of land actually affected by landmines and explosive remnants of war."

Under the new procedures, landmine experts would consider a range of indicators before determining whether to send deminers into a suspected hazardous area.

The conference in Sibenik was jointly organized by the UN, the Croatian Mine Action Centre and the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mines Victims Assistance.