

UNMAS Director's remarks at the GPC side event: Protection Dilemmas and Opportunities in frontline Humanitarianism: principles protection and proximity

**Monday 23 May, 8.30-10.00am
Rumeli Hall 5 (ICC)**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What do you tell an orphan who asks you whom he should talk to when he sees a dangerous item dropped, unexploded, on his house because both of his parents are dead?

What do you tell a girl when she asks you why people did not come faster to bring her food when she was living in "this place filled with "dangerous objects" that her teacher had taught her she should not get close too?

What do you tell an 87 year old gentleman who wants to reopen, safely, the candy store his father established over a century ago that now sits in the middle of a partially bombed neighborhood?

I am the Director of UNMAS, the coordinator of the Mine Action Area of Responsibility under the GPC.

1) What is mine action about?

To begin with, remember that mine action is not synonymous with demining.

Whereas demining is mostly a military activity limited to clearance of mines, humanitarian mine action is about protecting civilian populations and humanitarian aid workers from the threat of a wide range of explosive hazards, including mines, unexploded ammunition, and IEDs.

Mine action is about assessing the nature and scope of actual or perceived contamination of roads, land, residential and urban areas. Communities are interviewed, casualty and explosive hazards data are compiled, all to form a picture of the protection needs and wants of populations which drive mine action planning and programming.

This analysis assists in the design of situational and people-specific risk awareness programmes aimed at preventing death and injuries through education, behavioural change as well as through trainings on international standards, all of which UNMAS vets to ensure coherence and consistency of quality.

Mine action is also about marking contaminated areas, fencing them off, prioritizing where contamination has a human impact and clearing those areas of explosives.

2) UNMAS activates the Mine Action Area of Responsibility sub-cluster when contamination by explosive hazards constitutes a high-risk to civilian populations and impedes the delivery of

humanitarian aid and programming. Increasingly, UNMAS facilitates the work of humanitarian INGOs, local partners, UN agencies and the ICRC and Red Crescent, in sharing information and data which frames their plans. UNMAS provides them with technical and other advice, educational material and sometimes equipment, all aimed at improving their own survivability and access to high risk areas.

3) Today's main challenges and operational dilemmas are related to the nature of conflicts; the evolution of the weaponry used; the shocking disrespect for international humanitarian law; constant shifting of front lines from traditional battle areas to systematic targeting of civilians in urban and residential areas, by armed groups or national forces alike; and, within this context, the imperative to protect the integrity of humanitarian principles, namely: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Another dilemma is the increasing cost of humanitarian responses combined with the absolute necessity for humanitarian actors to maintain, at the center of their priorities, the needs and wants of the people rather than follow the attractive path of donor-driven and/or supply-driven action.

4) In today's violent world, the implementation of the SG's Agenda for Humanity will be strengthened by a consistent integration of humanitarian mine action into humanitarian responses.

Internally displaced people and refugees must be given access to risk awareness and education together with the assurance that they will walk on safe paths to return to homes and farm land free of explosive hazards. Humanitarian aid workers must be assured that their planes, truck convoys and rescue operations will not be "blown up" by an anti-tank mine planted on a landing pad, on a road, or by a booby-trapped hospital. National partners and survivors must be empowered through technical training, mentoring and access to humanitarian funding mechanisms.

In the spirit of our individual commitments to make the World Humanitarian Summit deliver on its promises, we must, all, stand up for affected communities and advocate for mine action to be understood as a core activity which anchors and enables the activities of all other protection actors.

UNMAS is committed to making this aspiration a daily reality.

THANK YOU.