Excellences, colleagues, friends,

I want to thank Germany for effectively leading the Mine Action Support Group for the last two challenging years, including in the hosting of the NDM last year, and I take this opportunity to also congratulate you on the adoption of your new strategy on humanitarian mine action for 2022-23 and on the presidency of the APMBC in 2023.

Looking forward, I welcome Ambassador Marek and France as the MASG Chair for 2022. UNMAS is grateful for France’s support of mine action priorities in the General Assembly and the Security Council.

I also thank all donors and partners present for your political and financial support to mine action, including in the adoption of last fall’s mine action resolution. The resolution incorporated new language on the impact of contamination on children; voiced deep concern about the increased use of IEDs; stressed the need to include persons with disabilities, refugees and IDPs in planning of mine action programmes; and emphasized the positive impact of coordination bodies such as the Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group. Thank you all for your consultation during the process.

I am pleased to be able to report several trends seen in 2021 data.

As the world emerged from pandemic lockdowns, the number of explosive ordnance casualties, including civilians, peacekeepers and uniformed personnel in countries and territories with a UN presence, has risen to just over 12,000; on average more than one person killed or wounded every hour of every day. The highest numbers of casualties were recorded in Syria followed by Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Civilians continue to be the most affected by explosive ordnance, with increased percentage of civilian casualties from 61% to an alarming 81% in 2021. The unprecedentedly low figure of almost 9,000 total casualties we reported for 2020 was likely linked to covid-related mobility and data-collection restrictions.

Nonetheless, despite the pandemic challenge, sustained clearance efforts continued to help communities live in safer environments. In Iraq, for example, the number of casualties decreased from almost 5,000 in pre-pandemic 2018 to around 1300 in 2021.

We continue to observe strong innovation and creativity in explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) - such as increased and creative use of social media, television, radio, billboard campaigns or phone apps for EORE.

The data on face-to-face EORE shows that 2.5 million beneficiaries were reached by UN-funded projects in 2021, compared to 2.4 million in 2020. Further, we see EORE integrated into national school curricula in more countries and more national focal points for EORE appointed.

We see signs of continued, improved national commitment to victim assistance. More countries and territories with a UN mine action presence now have a national disability policy compared to 2020. Also, more national authorities in 2021 reported having a national representative for victims of explosive ordnance.
Last but not least, investments in national capacity building continue to deliver returns. For example, in 2021 more countries and territories reported having a national mine action strategy than in 2020.

Despite our progress, mine action needs are considerable in Afghanistan, Colombia, Myanmar, South Caucasus, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. I am glad the agenda today includes some of these countries; we need your continued attention and commitment, including to act as our advocates.

Indeed, while some of these trends are positive, the presence of explosive ordnance, even one or two items, hampers humanitarian access, brings peacekeeper patrols to a halt, stops rebuilding in Gaza, Mosul and elsewhere, and hinders IDP returns and the resumption of normal life. It is critical that mine action be built into the humanitarian, development and peace and security instruments and budgets of your governments. I urge you to advocate for mine action across your various entities where possible. Likewise, within the relevant UN frameworks and organs; the 5th Committee, the C34, the Security Council.

Last year, I briefed you on the launch – at the request of the Security Council – of the Independent Strategic Review (ISR) on United Nations peacekeeping operations’ responses to IEDs. The ISR has concluded, and the report was presented to the Council in December 2021. UNMAS – together with the Department of Operational Support – is leading Secretariat efforts to implement the recommendations. I thank the Member States that enabled the ISR, with financial contributions or in-kind expertise, and call, and count, on your support to bring the recommendations to fruition.

Looking forward, we are launching an Independent Review of the UNMAS mine action delivery model which was requested by various United Nations oversight and budget bodies. The Review will look at the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the current delivery model, review alternative delivery models and then recommend the best way forward to ensure we are delivering the most cost-effective programmes that have the greatest impact for mine-affected countries and communities as well as for the safety and security of UN peacekeepers. I look forward to updating you.

I will conclude, in the hopeful anticipation of a less restrictive travel environment, by urging the MASG to visit an affected country in 2022. We would be delighted to support such a mission.

I hope to see many of you face-to-face at the next MASG meeting in the margins of the NDM at the end of June.
I wish you a successful meeting. Thank you.