

Opening remarks for Mr. Alexandre Zouev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, DPO

Mine Action Support Group Meeting

28 May 2021, 8.00am NY time

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to attend the Mine Action Support Group meeting today on behalf of USG Lacroix, Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

The 24th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors just concluded yesterday. The theme of the meeting was “**Perseverance, Partnership, Progress**”.

Indeed, since this group last met in October 2020, UN mine action has persevered – through multiple uncertainties and challenges faced. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact – but aside from this, the scenes from Gaza have raised deep concerns among the international community; Afghanistan faces uncertainty considering the withdrawal of US troops. We have also seen the need for a mine action response in the South Caucasus. [Note: all these issues will be discussed under today’s agenda.]

It is against this backdrop of new, changing and protracted conflicts that mine action perseveres. Perseverance takes commitment from a wide range of actors – including, of course, those of you here today.

I want to thank you for your generosity, your flexibility and your responsiveness. Affected countries and the mine action community call on you to continue, in fact to ramp up support in the face of crises such as those we are witnessing in Gaza and elsewhere.

Despite these challenges progress is being made.

In Colombia, a demining NGO made up of former FARC combatants, which received training and assistance from UNMAS, detected its first anti-personnel mine in March 2021. This was a milestone for the organization; a positive step towards addressing the legacies of conflict in that country.

In Sudan, where an UNMAS component has been integrated into the new UN political mission UNITAMS, mine action has enabled humanitarian access and opened roads between Government-controlled areas and those controlled by the SPLM-N armed opposition group. Just this month, mine action activities supported the UN’s first crossline food assistance mission to two enclaves in South Kordofan which had not been accessed since 2011.

In Syria, UNICEF has engaged with the Ministry of Health to integrate explosive ordnance risk education into national immunization programmes – creating new opportunities to reach communities in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

In multiple peacekeeping settings, mine action components continue to train peacekeepers, provide technical advice and respond to sightings of explosive ordnance – while ensuring that their mandates can be implemented safely, even in areas facing high explosive threats.

Progress has been in the Mine Action Area of Responsibility led by UNMAS and supported by UNDP and UNICEF at the country-level. Through their work, there has been an increase in the incorporation of mine action into humanitarian response plans in contaminated countries and territories.

In 2020, data collected against the UN Mine Action Strategy noted a significant drop in casualties from landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. While it will take some time to establish whether this was an outcome of COVID-19 restrictions or other factors, this trend still warrants acknowledgment.

The data also showed signs of progress with respect to national and local capacities, with more training delivered in 2020 by the UN, despite COVID-related challenges, and more countries and territories with key frameworks and plans, such as national mine action development plans in place.

The increase in the number of women serving in leadership or technical positions has been encouraging. The last plenary of the NDM-UN bravely tackled racial equality in mine action. We must ensure recommendations raised are brought into our work.

Looking ahead, it is critical that we continue and maximize progress.

- **First, through coordination and collaboration.** Close collaboration has guided UN mine action responses to crises in Gaza, the South Caucasus, Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea. Coordination ensured that capacities were effectively deployed, tailored to best “value add”, and that duplication was avoided. Engagement with NGOs and other relevant partners has also been ramped up through a series of informal consultations.
- **Enhanced integration is a second priority.** Efforts to ensure that mine action is integrated into overarching frameworks – for example, humanitarian response planning, and the Secretary-General’s *Action for Peacekeeping* initiative, or other agendas such as Children in Armed Conflict and the Protection of Civilians – will continue. Integration will ensure that the role of mine action across the “triple nexus” of humanitarian, development and peace and security efforts is leveraged to accelerate results.
- **The third priority relates to transparency and accountability.** UNMAS, the coordinator of United Nations mine action, has launched an ambitious management reform process to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Ongoing efforts in this respect aim to increase accountability and integrate guidance from Member States and appointed auditors into policies and programming.
- **Financial security is also a major aspect of the future of UN mine action.** In 2020, the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for mine action received more than 69 million US dollars – including from many of you here today. I wish to express again my sincere thanks for this support. Moreover, continued unearmarked contributions allowed

many critical interventions, including in Gaza the South Caucasus, and Ethiopia. We understand that COVID-19 has created unforeseen needs and has led to the redirection of international resources. Yet, we are compelled to appeal for your support, which is needed now more than ever.

It is clear that threats from explosive ordnance are not going away. In fact, we have seen new ones emerging, not only Gaza, but also from previously unreported explosive incidents in the Central African Republic to the spread of IED use in the Sahel.

To meet these complex demands, we will need strong partnerships. We will continue to rely on NGOs – who can mobilize quickly to reach communities most in need. Close engagement with national institutions must be maintained and strengthened, and we must explore even closer engagement with regional organizations. And you – those donors most committed to mine action – will play a key role not just through financial support – which is critical – but also through your political advocacy.

I thank you for your continued support to UN mine action – and wish you fruitful discussions today.

Thank you.