

**Remarks (abridged) by Ms. Ilene Cohn, Acting Director, UNMAS**

**MASG Meeting/ Discussion on the Sahel (28 May 2021)**

**1. Explosive ordnance - is creating major challenges in the Sahel.**

Accidents caused by landmines and ERW continue to be reported in the region.

Weak capacity to manage arms storage poses the twin risks of unintended explosions (e.g., tragedy in Bata, Equatorial Guinea) and arms diversion to illegal groups. The latter is compounded by easy access to commercially available explosives, and legacy arms diversion, including notably from the breakdown of Libya in 2011.

These factors have fuelled an increasingly prominent IED threat.

In some parts of the region, IEDs are the dominant explosive ordnance threat (In Mali: 3 ERW incidents and 68 IED incidents recorded as of 30 April 2021).

UNMAS has programmes in Mali, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, and our colleagues are witnessing the devastating impact of IEDs on civilians, institution building, socioeconomic development, and peace and security.

MINUSMA remains the mission most affected by IEDs. Although some of the data is encouraging - e.g. the decrease in peacekeeper deaths over the past few years, alongside an increase in the capacity of the mission to detect and neutralize IEDs - IEDs continue to impact mandate delivery and threaten peacekeeper lives.

**2. The need for a regional approach.**

The lack of border controls and the cross-border criminal and terrorist networks in the region mean that tackling IEDs on a country-by-country basis is doomed to fail.

A regional approach cannot be implemented without considering wider international dynamics.

There have been reports of migration of IED expertise and components from Iraq to the Sahel.

Arms sales, terrorist training camps and other activities outside the region also play a role.

Without strengthened, regional cohesion, international assistance efforts will form at best a patchwork of country-centric efforts each with their own incompatible terminologies, data management, and messaging.

**3. Growing momentum for a regional approach to the Sahel & strengthened focus on the IED threat in the region.**

The Security Council has increasingly embraced a regional approach to the Sahel, with a growing number of briefings and presidential statements on the region seen in recent years.

The Council has also expanded its interest to incorporate issues beyond security (humanitarian, development, even environmental dynamics - despite strong resistance from some P5 members on the latter point).

At the same time Member State focus on the threat of IEDs appears to be gaining momentum (including *in the Arria formula, SC debate on mine action, increased references in C34 report*).

Just last week, the Council met to discuss the G5/Sahel, with some members making explicit references to the IED threat.

This augurs well for political support to a regional approach to explosive threats in the Sahel.

**What can the mine action community do?** - a starting point is information sharing and prioritization among the partners active in the region.