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**Remarks by the
Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on
Mine Action
Meeting of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG)
6 February 2019, 1:00pm**

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Under-Secretary-General Lacroix and Assistant Secretary-General Zouev regret that they cannot be with you today, but I am delighted to join you today in their stead to speak to you as the Chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

I thank the United States for its continued leadership of this forum as it enters its second year as MASG chair. I know that you continue to recognize the value of this mechanism and encourage thoughtful dialogue and exchange of information.

Let me also express my sincere gratitude to all the donors in the room for your Governments' steadfast support for the mine action work of the United Nations. Your political, financial and in-kind contributions have enabled a stronger and more effective United Nations. We are, through your assistance, fit for purpose in these challenging times, to respond to the needs of millions of people impacted by conflict, and to assist affected states to develop their capacity to tend to their own needs.

In mine action and the United Nations more broadly, we are in a period of reform and of new opportunity with the realization of the Secretary-

General's ambitious reform agenda. We have also ushered in a new era for multilateral mine action with the Strategy of the United Nations Mine Action 2019-2023, launched officially this week and presented jointly by UNMAS, UNDP and UNICEF at the last meeting of the MASG in New York. The Strategy provides us with a clear and focused direction that is adapted to realities and to the Secretary-General's vision of a coherent and effective UN response.

I would like to thank you again for your invaluable inputs during the consultations last year to develop the Strategy. It is the result of exemplary collaboration – across the UN system, through the strong engagement of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, with donors such as yourselves, affected states, and other partners.

The end-result is a practical, needs-driven, people-centred document with clear goals and indicators, by which progress and results may be assessed.

The Strategy represents a deepening of the UN's approach to mine action, with strong emphasis on risk mitigation, assistance to victims, protection, gender, national capacity development, prevention and, broadly speaking, development outcomes and achievement of the SDGs. It also elaborates how mine action continues to be integrated

within broader humanitarian, peace and security, and development frameworks. With the 2019-2023 Strategy, we as the United Nations are also making a commitment to strengthened accountability – to the communities we serve, to affected countries, to donors and to partners. Here too your support is needed to ensure that the United Nations is equipped to deliver the rigorous monitoring, reporting and evaluation envisioned in the Strategy.

I urge your Governments to invest in the protection of individuals and communities through survey, clearance and risk education programming. I call on you to support the efforts of the UN to strengthen national mine action capacities for ownership, leadership, and management of mine action responsibilities in line with the primary role of States underscored in both General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

People are and must remain at the heart of our work. Assistance to victims is a crucial pillar of mine action that has been underscored by Member States time and time again yet remains critically underfunded. The 2019-2023 Strategy reflects a consensus that we, **all**, must do more. This is, for the UN, a commitment to stronger advocacy and a robust coordination role that provides sustainable support to survivors, affected family members and communities, consistent with the global commitment to “leave no one behind” under the Agenda 2030.

The UN General Assembly has called on all parts of the UN system to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women within their mandates and ensure that commitments on paper lead to progress on the ground. UNMAS and the IACG-MA will continue to promote women as “frontline” mine action delivery agents and create environments where new generations of strong female leaders offer diverse perspectives and experiences to lift impacted communities.

In response to this call, the IACG-MA has just completed an update of the UN Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes, enabled thanks to contributions from Australia, the Netherlands and Denmark. These UN guidelines provide practical steps to mainstream gender and promote gender equality in mine action programmes, based on experience from the sector. They are intended for use by both UN mine action field personnel and all other stakeholders to ensure that mine action programmes support gender equality and fulfil their potential to promote transformative progress in many affected countries.

Today, nearly half the world’s population – 46 per cent – is 24 years-old or younger. Young women and men are a top priority for the United Nations. They are also, unfortunately, a prime target of extremist recruiters. Within the UN system, we recognize that mine action poses

tremendous opportunities for young women and men; and we prioritize their employment in all mine action programming. Our youth are agents of change and young people's inclusion in the peace and security agenda and society more broadly, is key to building and sustaining peace.

Mine action is a concrete step towards peace and plays an important role in stemming the resurgence of violence as a critical enabler of stabilization. As we have seen in Iraq and Gaza, the rapid removal of hazardous explosive devices in urban areas is a pre-requisite for the safe return of displaced people and the restoration of basic services. It also prevents those explosives from being harvested for criminal use.

Mine action is also recognized as an important confidence building measure in peace building and sustainment. We have seen this in Colombia, where mine action was given a major cross-cutting role in the peace agreement between the Government and the FARC. Funded by contributions from the PBF and Norway to the Colombia Post-Conflict UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, the UNMAS-managed project is delivering peace dividends by supporting the socio-economic reintegration of former combatants through humanitarian demining. The project exemplifies the benefits of multi-stakeholder partnerships, working across the development humanitarian-peacebuilding nexus,

and the role of mine action in peace processes to build conditions for sustaining peace.

The United Nations will continue also to focus on regional and sub-regional approaches, in close partnership with regional partners. Tackling cross-border humanitarian and security challenges in a sub-regional and regional manner enables the United Nations to more efficiently mitigate the threats of explosive hazards in sub-regions like the Sahel, Lake Chad basin, and Horn of Africa.

We will invest in localization to empower homegrown mine action organizations. Professional, well-equipped and trained, local demining entities are key to the future of sustainable, local community development.

The 2019-2023 Strategy places immense importance on our mine action approaches being cost-effective, strategic and accountable. Lack of coherence and duplication of effort, whether in the UN system or outside, risk undermining the effectiveness of our response and our ability to achieve sustainable results.

I urge you to continue to advocate for this coherence and to highlight the value of a joint, multilateral response to mine action at every opportunity. Together, we must ensure that mine action remains at the top of the international agenda, here at the United Nations as well as in your respective capitals.

We will need your assistance, both political and financial, to operationalize the Strategy and guide our work over the next five years. The vision of a world free of the threat of mines, explosive remnants of war including cluster munitions and improvised explosive devices cannot be achieved by the UN alone. As I said at the outset of my remarks, it requires a strong partnership.

I look forward to fruitful discussions today and count on you to continue to champion the cause of mine action.

Thank you.