

**Opening Remarks by
Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix,
Under-Secretary-General, Department of Peace Operations
Mine Action Support Group Meeting
24 October 2023**

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

Grazie, **Ambassador Massari**, and **Mr. Demichele** (the Chair of the Mine Action Support Group). I am delighted to be here with you in my capacity as Chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (or the IACG-MA). I would like to thank all members of the Mine Action Support Group for your steadfast support.

The expertise of United Nations mine action actors is in demand in many different places, including Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Mali, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to our exceptionally courageous mine action colleagues who continue to work in many if not all of the most dangerous places in the world.

The mine action sector in many affected countries and territories struggle for funds. Though it is encouraging the daunting mine action requirements in Ukraine are reasonably well funded.

Mine action in humanitarian response plans, (HRPs), for example, face a severe funding gap. We have shared with you an infographic with the latest figures. Out of a total appeal in the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plans of USD 341 million, the humanitarian community **urgently needs USD 189 million to protect 74.5 million people from the risk of mines and explosive ordnance**. As you see on the infographic: Ukraine has received the most funding – 85 per cent of total funds requested – while Mali, Nigeria and Yemen, along with Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Syria have each received less than 20 per cent of the amount requested.

As far as United Nations Mine Action Service funding needs are concerned, I would **appeal for more predictable, multi-year and flexible funding for mine action** through the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action (or the VTF), to address significant humanitarian needs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are aware, the Secretary-General issued his latest report on assistance in mine action in August and its related resolution was successfully adopted by consensus in the Fourth Committee earlier this month. The resolution will be put before the General Assembly in December.

I am pleased that in this year's resolution Member States included language linking mine action with 'reducing the human cost of weapons', as outlined in the New Agenda for Peace, noting the establishment of the Global Advocate for persons with disabilities in conflict, and reinforcing linkages between mine action and extreme weather events, climate shocks and the ability to cultivate land.

I acknowledge the exceptional leadership of Poland in facilitating consultations successfully again this year on behalf of the European Union.

Dear Colleagues,

Please allow me to elaborate on three areas raised by the Secretary-General in his report:

First, we continue to record unacceptable numbers of civilian casualties from explosive ordnance – mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

Data provided in 2022 by United Nations programmes, after validation by national authorities, identified over 9,000 casualties in 27 of countries and territories. **Civilians constituted about three quarters of this total.**

Recent and ongoing conflicts are also **increasingly fought in populated centres**, which produce unacceptable immediate and long-lasting consequences for civilians.

Such use of explosive weapons in populated areas damages not only **residential structures but also water and energy infrastructure, hospitals and schools and leads to complex explosive ordnance clearance challenges**, such as rendering safe unexploded ordnance buried deep in rubble.

Second, despite the catalytic role of mine action in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (or the SDG) targets, the Secretary-General notes in the New Agenda for Peace that **without a dramatic reduction in conflict, violence and the spread of weapons, the 2030 Agenda will remain out of reach** for many people, in particular those in countries affected by conflict.

For instance, explosive ordnance contamination hinders access to agricultural areas in **Ukraine**, damages arable land in **South Sudan** and prevents adequate irrigation of land in **Yemen**.

Extreme weather events and climate shocks must also be factored into SDG implementation plans, and into mine action operations as well. For instance, the flooding of land and roads in consecutively heavier and longer rainy seasons in **Abyei** shorten the period during which clearance activities could be conducted. And just last month, after two dams broke during a powerful storm in Derna, **Libya**, floodwaters shifted landmines and other explosive ordnance left over from years of conflict, posing an extra risk to the thousands of displaced people now on the move.

Third, the United Nations continues to operate in dangerous environments with high IED threats.

The presence of IEDs turn routine **use of roads and fields** into a life-threatening undertaking, especially for civilians. IEDs also **restrict the mobility** of humanitarian personnel and peacekeepers, impeding the delivery of humanitarian aid and limiting peacekeepers' ability to protect civilians. As **IED technology keeps evolving**, it is harder to detect devices and prevent harm.

In **Somalia**, the year 2022 saw the highest number of IED incidents ever recorded. In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, a change in tactics by a non-state armed group led to increasing IED attacks directed against civilians in public places. In **Mali**, the IED threat has gradually expanded from the North to the Centre and more recently to the West and South of the country.

In **Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mali**, where peace operations are drawing down in the near and medium term, it would be essential to maintain national mine action capacity-building efforts and risk education, including through the work of United Nations country teams, so that the protection of civilians and residual contamination are addressed.

Dear Colleagues,

One of the hallmarks of the mine action sector is that **it continues to deliver**, and the Secretary-General's report notes a number of achievements. For example, in 2022:

- the United Nations enabled the **clearance and release of 163 square kilometres** of previously contaminated land;
- in-person explosive ordnance risk education (or EORE) **reached over 5.5 million people**;
- 14 United Nations programmes **supported referral pathways linking victims of explosive ordnance accidents to services** provided by the State or other partners. In some cases, where referral pathways were unavailable, the United Nations provided direct assistance;
- 21 countries and territories supported by the United Nations now have **national mine action standards**, which enhance the quality and safety of mine action activities.
 - o More specifically, supported by the United Nations, the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** adopted a decree on mine action in 2022.
 - o The United Nations supported the development of national IED standards in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, and the development of a national counter-IED strategy in **Burkina Faso**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I look forward to the 27th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and United Nations Advisers to be held next year in Geneva, from 29 April to 1 May. I am pleased that UNMAS, on behalf of the IACG-MA is continuing its partnership with the Geneva Center for Humanitarian Demining to co-host and co-organize the meeting. I am very grateful to Switzerland for their generous support.

United Nations is committed to working in partnership with you to continue our mine action efforts in an effective, cost-efficient, transparent and accountable manner. In the current challenging geopolitical and economic environment, we count on your commitment and support to our efforts for a mine free world.

Thank you.