

**Remarks by Mr. Ladsous
Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations
Meeting of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG)
11 October 2016**

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to express my gratitude for the continued commitment of your Governments to support the efforts and operations of the United Nations in Mine Action. In this context, I would like to particularly thank our host **Ambassador Lambertini** for Italy's strong commitment, as well as his personal engagement, as Chair of the Mine Action Support Group .

As conflicts rage across the world, and the threats posed by explosive hazards perpetuate humanitarian crises and hinder emergency response, mine action is needed more than ever. Thanks to UNMAS' leading role, United Nations entities deliver a coordinated and effective response to the challenges related to explosive remnants of war, mines, IEDs and other explosive ordnance posing a threat to civilians all over the world.

In Syria, mine action protects the lives of displaced people as they seek safe havens from violence. **In Iraq**, where improvised explosive devices are placed under bridges and along roadsides, mine action allows humanitarian convoys to reach their final destination and deliver their life-saving aid to populations desperately in need. **In Gaza**, even as it grabs fewer headlines these days, internally displaced people are still attempting to return to their homes where unexploded bombs lie hidden in the rubble. Mine action allows them to rebuild

their homes safely. Mine action, in short, is indeed humanitarian action, driven by needs and centred on people.

In **South Sudan**, mine action enables delivery of the Protection of Civilians mandate of the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission. For example, the expansion of UNMISS PoC sites required the clearance of explosive hazards in nineteen locations. In the aftermath of the July conflict, UNMAS was a critical first responder. Through rapid intervention by UNMAS, explosive hazards were removed from key UN locations including the apron of the Juba airstrip, WFP and other agencies compounds, UNMISS bases, PoC sites, schools and residential civilian areas.

The critical role of mine action for the humanitarian agenda was recognized in the discussions at the World Humanitarian Summit in May this year, and was also reflected in the outcome documents, including the report of the Secretary-General. Perhaps one of the most moving moments of the opening ceremony was when Mr. Adeeb Ateeq, a Syrian refugee, took to the stage in front of thousands of people and shared his story of losing his leg while trying to clear landmines in an attempt to protect his fellow citizens. During this Summit, many of your Governments spoke out on the critical need for mine action.

Mine action is also vital in supporting **stabilization efforts**, through facilitating the recovery of communities impacted by conflict. In **Iraq**, for example, following the ousting of Da'esh from Ramadi, Falluja and Karma, mine action emergency response teams surveyed and cleared 188 priority sites, removing more than 1,800 explosive hazards and thereby enabled access to facilitate stabilization efforts. In this regard, mine action acts as the bridge that connects humanitarian action and stabilization. As Iraqis work to rebuild their homes, communities and lives in the

aftermath of Da'esh, mine action efforts are needed for people to safely return home, and ensure that schools, hospitals and infrastructure are open and accessible.

The United Nations is mandated to deliver an efficient and effective mine action response. For this, both **leadership and coordination** are vital. Last December, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on assistance in mine action which recognized UNMAS as the coordinator of mine action within the United Nations system (A/70/80).

In this capacity, enhanced by its partnership with organizations such as the African Union and NATO, UNMAS draws on its unique position on the frontlines of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and Syria to lead the mine action sector's coordination of international, national and civil society responses.

Most recently, UNMAS efforts have further strengthened the mine action response to the threat posed by improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, as called upon by the General Assembly in its resolutions on "assistance in mine action" (A/70/80) and "Countering the threat posed by IEDs" (A/70/46).

A growing number of peacekeepers, particularly in Mali, have benefitted from UNMAS' expertise, advice and training. UNMAS has undertaken a broad range of activities, including the development of an IED lexicon, the expansion of an online hub of information and research related to IEDs, and the establishment of guidelines for IED threat mitigation in United Nations peace operations. Indeed, **UNMAS support of peace operations**, including IED awareness training and capacity development, is critical for the safety and mobility of peacekeepers, and ultimately the delivery of Mission mandates. UNMAS also led the incorporation of the threat of IEDs into new policies, such as the updated United Nations Policy on

Victim Assistance in Mine Action, launched at the 9th Conference of States Parties to the Convention on Persons with Disabilities in June.

New technology has been utilized by UNMAS at every opportunity, including through the development of risk education apps and the procurement of specialized technical equipment and tools.

The next step for UNMAS is to use the platform of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on mine action to map the United Nations work on IED threat mitigation. UNMAS is also in the process of initiating consultations on the elaboration of benchmarks and standards necessary for the sector to evaluate experts, training, equipment and the overall response to the threat of IEDs. This increase in requests for UNMAS to advise on and provide support to IED- related activities requires dedicated in-house resources.

In fact, as UNMAS leads the UN response to complex explosive threats, and expands its response in support of peacekeeping, humanitarian and stability operations, it needs to reinforce its capacities at Headquarters: for programme backstopping and oversight, as well as for technical and policy guidance. I call on you to consider strengthening your support to UNMAS by contributing additional funding to its core resources and the specialized capacities, such as countering IEDs, which we urgently need in order to confront today's challenges.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to thank you again for your continued support to this important field of work. Mine Action has become an indispensable bridge between peace and security, between humanitarian response and stabilization, which is necessary for long-term development. It is absolutely clear that the achievement of almost all of the Sustainable Development Goals in countries affected by

landmines and other explosive hazards, must be underpinned by successful mine action responses.

I thank you.