

## SLIDE No. 1

[Greeting]

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and the Urban Environment is a topic I spoke about briefly at the MASG meeting in NY in October and that continues to be a key focus of GICHD work. So I am thankful to have the opportunity to address it further today.

Conflicts in cities have become the norm in recent years. This is worrisome: the human suffering that results from war being waged in city streets is far more significant than in case of conflict taking place in open areas. The ICRC has estimated that 50 million people (mostly civilians) are bearing the brunt of urban conflict.

For mine action, addressing cities has always been more complicated due to the density of populations and infrastructure and the multiplicity of actors. Fortunately, in the past urban areas tended to be cleared quickly, and the MA sector's long-term work rapidly moved out into rural settings – where most of the contamination would be found.

Today, the challenge is double:

- MA has to deal with high levels of contamination in cities,
- much of it is of an improvised nature.

Dealing with IEDs is dangerous and challenging because of the guess-work involved. It is often said that the only limitation in their construction is the imagination of the designer. Urban environments offer many more possibilities in terms of placement and camouflage. The requirement to have safe and effective procedures is therefore all the more important – as evidenced, I am afraid, by the number of accidents that have occurred while organizations have been dealing with IEDs. This is why we as a sector have been working very hard on this in recent times.

## SLIDE No. 2

Allow me to begin by reminding us of the scope and dramatic consequences of urban conflict.

You see before you the example of Syria, which is one of the countries involved in the case studies we have been carrying out on urban MA. The diagram is produced by OCHA's IDP Task Force.

What struck me initially when looking at it was the tremendous scale of the movements of people during and around conflict. Thinking about an estimated 6.5 million<sup>1</sup> people on the move is striking, indeed – not far from the entire population of Switzerland.

The second thing I noticed is that there is significant back and forth movement. Raqqa, for example, where we have studied the work of several MA organizations engaged in clearance, is apparently a net “receiver” of displaced persons – and this while major clearance operations are on-going.

The pressures being faced by MA operators to clear areas as rapidly as possible, before individuals occupy, is very significant.

This diagram also highlights the importance of RE in urban environments. When we bring in the challenge of an environment affected by IEDs, however, engaging in RE is particularly difficult. Much of traditional MRE is based on recognition of explosives – but IEDs that are always changing are not easily recognized. RE must therefore be tailored to teach people about reading the complex scenarios where IEDs are found ... and what NOT to do in that context. This is significantly more challenging than traditional MRE.

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<sup>1</sup> IDP Task force is coordinated by OCHA. 6.5 Million is the total number of IDPs estimated as at August 2018. 1.575 M is the number of IDPs that moved between Jan and Nov 2018. An estimated 66,934 people moved in Nov 2018 alone.

### **SLIDE No. 3**

Despite the difficulties and the risks, operators are currently carrying out clearance of IEDs in urban environments. Those that were at the forefront of these challenging environments in Syria and Iraq have suffered accidents. Just 2 weeks ago a commercial operator suffered injuries due to 5 staff falling through the floor of a building that was not structurally sound. This demonstrates the very real dangers of non-explosive threats.

As we all know, the guidance within the IMAS framework needed updating. There was no chapter targeted at locating and disposing of IEDs for example. Similarly, there was no guidance on clearing buildings – which is a very pervasive activity, indeed.

On both fronts, I am happy to say that much progress was achieved last Monday by the IMAS RB, under the chairmanship of UNMAS: both

- the IED Disposal IMAS and
- the Building Clearance IMAS

were approved by the Board.

This is a significant achievement, one we all worked hard towards.

[To give you an idea of the importance of this development, I highlight one example. The production of this Standard involved addressing reporting formats. Some organizations were being asked to report in m3. While this makes sense at some level, the complication of calculating this took valuable time away from teams.

Another example is refining the terminology of how we report, based on what activities we are doing. In open areas we speak of NTS, TS and Clearance. In buildings, once NTS is done, we have 3 different levels of clearance. . These have been documented and can now be used to clarify exactly what operators are doing in a building.]

#### SLIDE No. 4

To be sure, further detailed guidance will need to be developed.

Search procedures and detection methods are two of these very real challenges.

On the previous slide you saw huge piles of rubble, and large metal structures. If you look at the IED pictured here, which was found by Janus in Iraq, you can imagine the challenge of locating this relatively small metal object in a pile of rubble. Or simply having to enter a building filled with metal to find this piece of metal that happens to be filled with an explosive charge – especially when we realize that metal detection is our primary means of detecting EO.

It is a painstaking job that can differ substantially between buildings. One building could be “cleared” with just a visual search, if a threat assessment determines that there is no threat from Victim-Operated IEDs. Another might require the use of drones, animal detection and the opening of every drawer, cavity and fitting, if the threat assessment carried out cannot discount that VO-IEDs are present. From a few minutes to a few or many days... The challenge here is to account for this variation and to monitor efficiency. We are working on that. The threat assessment annex to the new Risk Management IMAS was also passed by the RB last Monday and is the first step at standardizing the vital process of threat assessment.

And once we have located and destroyed this IED, an additional challenge is: How do we report it? Is it an AP mine? Or is it a Victim Operated IED? And, once we decide how it will be reported, work on databases, forms and the training of National Authorities will be required. It is especially important that devices and area do not get double-counted or confused in reports. We will be working on that as well.

It seems that we have more questions than answers, but we as a sector are slowly working through these problems.

## SLIDE No. 5

Let me conclude by looking at what has proven particularly difficult in urban settings – general assessment and mapping, prioritization and tasking.

The process of survey and mapping urban areas is challenging because of the density of cities. Our research has shown that this has been done in different ways. In some cases, entire cities have been categorized as SHAs by operators. Using this approach, the risk is that we could end up putting significant areas on databases that are NOT contaminated. It is important to be thorough, no doubt. But it is equally important not to waste resources or needlessly block the delivery of other humanitarian assistance because we have declared areas “contaminated”. We may need to look carefully at new ways to manage mapping in urban environments.

GIS is a tool that can and must be used, and we must reach out to other sectors to ensure that we can benefit from the most recent information and analysis. Organizations such as OCHA or Habitat for Humanity may have valuable data on residences and infrastructure that have been damaged by conflict.

For this reason, the act of coordination itself is both urgent and complex in urban environments. There are currently cases where clearance assets are being tasked two and three times to the same site. This is a waste of time and resources. The frequency of this occurrence, however, points to the fact that the process is not straight-forward.

## **SLIDE No. 6**

As we reflect on the various challenges of this “new normal”, the questions for donors are likely to include addressing issues around:

- programme design, ensuring that funding for mine action is linked with national planning and coordination mechanisms, avoiding duplication
- selection of implementing partners (to ensure they have the right skill set),
- ensuring that quality management systems are in place at the level of national authorities,
- ensuring that reporting is standardized and being carried out according to good practice.

Thank you for your attention