

United Nations



Nations Unies

**Remarks by**

**Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy  
Emergency Response Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, United  
Nations**

**19<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors  
and UN Advisers**

**Tuesday 19 February 2016**

*As delivered*

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Excellencies,  
Esteemed Colleagues,

On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, I am delighted to join you for the 19<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of Mine Action national Programme Directors and UN Advisors.

I have been a big fan of mine actors and UN Mine Action. I am happy that UNMAS is now a participant in the IASC Emergency Directors Group and humanitarian teams that OCHA coordinates in many conflict-triggered humanitarian crises around the world. I am grateful to the United Nations Mine Action Service as Chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action for setting the agenda of this year's meeting around the themes that have emerged in the wide-ranging consultations leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit, which the Secretary-General will convene in Istanbul on 23 and 24 May this year.

The WHS has been a unique multi-stakeholder process from the very beginning, involving governments, NGOs, international organizations, the private sector and, most importantly, affected communities. They will come together in Istanbul to reaffirm and share humanity. There will not be a negotiated outcome as in the usual inter-governmental process.

The Secretary-General called for the first ever World Humanitarian Summit to galvanize global action to address the unprecedented levels of human suffering and humanitarian need in the world today. Nearly 60 million people have been forced from their homes by conflict and violence, a level not seen since the Second World War, prompting the Secretary-General and the President of the ICRC to issue an unprecedented joint warning last October about the impact of today's conflicts on civilians, who are being killed and maimed in war zones, where blatant violations of the basic rules of international humanitarian law are routinely being committed, with utter impunity. Furthermore, in the last two decades, 218 million people each year were also affected by natural disasters. The size of the UN global humanitarian appeal has risen 550 per cent, from \$3.4 billion in 2003 to \$18.7 billion in 2015 and to nearly \$20 billion at the start of this year. While the generosity of donors has increased from year to year, so too has the funding gap which was over \$10 billion at the end of 2015, and is likely to grow even bigger in the foreseeable future unless some bold changes are made

to reduce humanitarian needs and the way humanitarian action is funded. In sum, humanity is at a breaking point and, as the Secretary-General points out, the World Humanitarian Summit is our opportunity to confront these issues head on.

The Summit will build upon the extensive consultation process held over the past two years that has reached more than 23,000 people in 153 countries, and that resulted in the Synthesis report which was discussed at the Global Consultations here in Geneva last October as well as the Secretary General's report for the World Humanitarian Summit which was recently released. In his report, the Secretary-General underscores the shared responsibility that we all must shoulder to address the challenges to our common humanity, and outlines an ambitious "Agenda for Humanity". Mine actors have a vital contribution to make in breathing life into the agenda for humanity and the five core responsibilities that this requires. Let me elaborate on some of the key connections.

The first core responsibility is to prevent and end conflict and the enormous human suffering that they cause, pointing out in no uncertain that this requires political actors, political solutions, unity of purpose, sustained leadership and investment in peaceful societies.

Mine action is a sure investment in peaceful societies, and much has been achieved with this investment. The number of people killed or injured by landmines has declined by two-thirds since a peak number of casualties in 2005. We have accomplished a great deal and can rightfully take pride. But the battle is far from won, and considerable challenges remain that require global leadership and political will.

Some areas that have seen progress in eliminating mines are facing new contamination and need continued engagement. New threats have emerged - the reckless use of explosive weapons in populated areas has brought new challenges and had devastating humanitarian impact in countries such as Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. Civilians are killed, critical infrastructure destroyed and areas left contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW). In Yemen, between January and July 2015, 95 per cent of deaths and injuries from explosive weapons used in populated areas were civilians. Globally, this figure is 92 per cent. The Secretary-General has urged all parties to conflict to refrain from using explosive weapons with wide areas effects in populated areas.

Natural disasters can also exacerbate threats, as seen during the Indian Ocean Tsunami that uprooted and exposed old mines in Sri Lanka and presented new protection challenges.

The second responsibility outlined by the Secretary-General is to shore up the norms that safeguard our humanity, and strengthen compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. We must use our collective leverage to strengthen compliance and our collective voice to speaking the truth and in condemning serious violations and the appalling brutality and abuses that we are witnessing today in Syria, Yemen and other conflict zones. Thus, the Secretary-General has called upon Member States to come together to discuss and identify ways to strengthen respect for and compliance with international humanitarian law as a matter of urgency and is seeking the commitment of Member States to support ongoing efforts to share good practice and develop guidance to enhance the protection of civilians and reduce the humanitarian impact of explosive weapons in populated areas. The Mine Ban Treaty is a vital addition to IHL and mine action has been instrumental in reducing or eliminating the indiscriminate threat posed by mines and ERW and increased peoples' safety. It has also supported humanitarian access by enabling humanitarian actors to reach populations in need, or making it easier for people to access assistance and services.

In Gaza between the end of the 2014 conflict and the end of October 2015, 15 Palestinians died and 91 were injured in ERW-related incidents. The United Nations cleared 3,000 items of ERW from residential, commercial and government buildings in 2015, and safely removed an estimated 600,000 tons of rubble from destroyed buildings, increasing the safety of civilians, humanitarian staff and reconstruction workers and improving access to basic services for approximately 250,000 people. But this is an ongoing struggle, as long as conflicts and violence persist. In Kobane, on the northern border of Syria, the presence of mines and ERW remains a grave danger for people and a serious impediment to delivery of humanitarian assistance and the city's recovery.

The third responsibility in the Agenda for Change, echoing the universal commitment of the Sustainable Development Goals, is to leave no one behind. Indeed many would be left behind without mine action, which benefits a broad spectrum of people, including many vulnerable groups. Mine Risk Education and clearance help to protect children, who are often the victims of mines and ERW. Over the last two years, the United Nations delivered such education in 18 countries or territories. In Syria, over 1.3 million children were reached with both community-based and school-based mine risk education by the UN and partners in 2015. In Gaza, within three weeks of the 2014 ceasefire, every school affected by the conflict was declared safe in time for the start of the new academic year thanks to UN clearance activities.

Mine action also supports durable solutions for internally displaced people and refugees by helping to make homes and neighbourhoods safe to return to, especially in densely populated urban areas. In Iraq, nearly half a million people forced to flee conflict in Ramadi are unable to return home, due to the rampant use of explosive weapons by ISIL and high levels of destruction. Some 3.3 million people are internally displaced – many of whom will face similar challenges to returning home.

Victim Assistance programs informed by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have provided essential care and services for those disabled by mines and ERW, and helped to restore dignity. The Afghan Government estimates that there are 250,000 survivors of landmines and ERW - one of the highest numbers in the world. In the last two years alone, almost 20,000 people were provided with physical rehabilitation services and vocational training through the United Nations and its partners.

The fourth core responsibility is to change people's lives with a shift from delivering aid to ending need. This speaks very much to your planned discussions on resilience. Clearance operations, Mine Risk Evaluation and victim's assistance in affected areas are essential to both reducing people's vulnerability and supporting their ability to recover. Clearance of affected land used to cultivate and pastures for livestock support the transition from crisis to development and build the resources and resilience of communities. Indeed mine clearance is an early sign of recovery. In the aftermath of conflict, mine action is essential for bringing assistance to communities in need and facilitating the settlement of refugees and IDPs. In the longer term, mine action brings humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors together in support of a country's transition toward peace.

The final core responsibility is about investing in humanity and making the political, institutional and financing investments needed to act upon our shared responsibilities. Mine action is an investment in people and countries. Mine action is an investment in humanity. It is crucial that, where there are threats and risks of mines and ERW, this is reflected in our humanitarian assessments and response plans, and that mine action is included within humanitarian appeals.

Partnerships are also integral to supporting countries that have suffered from mines and ERW to build the institutions and programs for these important tasks, including through South-South cooperation, such as the recent exchanges between States such as Benin, Jordan, Mali and Tajikistan. The breadth of professionals assembled here representing countries from across the globe is truly heartening in this regard.

The global humanitarian community has much to learn from you. A resounding call throughout the regional and thematic consultations in the lead up of the WHS has been the demand for greater local and national ownership and empowerment. For international actors, such as the IASC and its members to reinforce rather than replace local actors. This call for localization has a prominent place in both the Synthesis report and the SG's report. "As local as possible, as international as necessary" has become the motto for which the Summit in Istanbul must deliver.

The mine action community has been truthful to this principle from the very beginning, and I am heartened to see that UNMAS Strategic Framework for 2013-2018 demonstrates an abiding commitment to this principle in all of its strategic objectives. The presence here of so many national actors and leaders is a testament to this, and I have no doubt that the experience and lessons learned by mine actors will be a model as the humanitarian community as a whole endeavours to live up to key promises of the WHS.

In sum, I applaud the work of mine actors and am very excited that your discussions for the next three days are structured so as to elaborate the linkages between mine action and the changes we aspire to trigger through the WHS towards the future of humanitarian action that is fit for purpose. I greatly look forward to the outcomes of your discussion.

End.