

MINUTES

MASG MEETING

Wednesday, 29 April 2019

Room B, CICG - Geneva

1. OPENING REMARKS

1.1 Chair. The Chair of the meeting, Mr Tarek Chazli, Deputy Head of Humanitarian Affairs and Mine Action, MFA Rome, opened the meeting at 16.30 hours and welcomed the 60 MASG members and observers present. He explained that the Chair of the MASG, Ambassador Maurizio Massari, the Permanent Representative of Mission of Italy to the UN in New York was not able to attend today's meeting in Geneva, but that he would make some opening remarks via live video link.

1.2 Ambassador Maurizio Massari. Ambassador Massari welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that the MASG serves as an important coordination platform for major donor countries engaged in humanitarian demining efforts, and serves as a useful forum for information exchange, financial coordination, and resource pooling. Ambassador Massari said that for the second year of the chair of the MASG, Italy's objective was to highlight the nexus between humanitarian demining and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, to spotlight the "humanitarian-recovery link, and emphasize the pivotal role of demining - not only in safeguarding civilians and humanitarian workers, but also as a prerequisite for the physical reconstruction of both rural and urban areas. Ambassador Massari said that it was evident that humanitarian demining is essential for restoring food security, facilitating the safe return of internally displaced persons, accelerating economic recovery, and implementing projects aimed at building resilient communities. He went on to say that under the framework of the G7 Presidency, Italy remains unwavering in its dedication to address global challenges through international cooperation, and that humanitarian demining holds a prominent place in this. Finally, Ambassador Massari noted that last year Italy allocated more than EUR 8 million to mine action.

The full statement by Ambassador Massari can be found on the MASG website at <https://www.mineaction.org/en/resources/documents/masg>

1.3 USG Jean-Pierre Lacroix. The Under-Secretary General of the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), Mr Jean-Pierre Lacroix was then invited to address the meeting. Mr Lacroix thanked Ambassador Massari for his welcome, and also the Government of Switzerland for hosting the NDM-UN. Mr Lacroix explained that he was here in his capacity as the Chair of the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action (IACG-MA).

Mr Lacroix started by thanking the donors for their commitment to mine action and noted that, regrettably, the global needs had increased since the MASG met in October last year. He said that

this is glaringly evident in Gaza. Since 7 October 2023, the United Nations continued to maintain a mine action presence on the ground, and staff, while at risk themselves, have continued to deliver explosive ordnance risk education, conduct infrastructure threat assessments, and support to humanitarian staff and convoys. UNMAS is expected to coordinate the mine action response and will ensure operators are well positioned to join multi-disciplinary needs assessments as soon as conditions allow.

Mr Lacroix went on to say that the downsizing and closing of United Nations peace operations has continued: the last peacekeepers have left Mali; UNITAMS has formally closed in Sudan; and the MONUSCO transition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is progressing, with the Force expected to have withdrawn from South Kivu by 30 April. In each of these locations, the governments have requested that UNMAS remain and implement non-mission programmes. These can only be funded from voluntary contributions. However, contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) have decreased and in 2023 it received \$30 million in voluntary contributions, which was \$20 million less than in 2022. By comparison, the VTF received \$118 million in 2018.

Mr Lacroix warned that some other UNMAS programmes are at risk of closing this year, such as Burkina Faso, Colombia, and Nigeria, unless funding is secured. Programmes in Ethiopia, Syria and Iraq will face the same fate in early 2025. When an UNMAS programme closes it leaves behind a coordination gap, national authorities lose technical expertise and advisory support, humanitarians lose a source of hazard awareness training, information management suffers, and advocacy initiatives are disrupted. Mr Lacroix highlighted that two thirds of world-wide mine action funding is now allocated to Ukraine. Meanwhile, many other countries such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Yemen, and Syria received less than 30% of their respective humanitarian appeals. Many partners have discontinued their risk education, victim assistance, survey, and clearance activities.

Mr Lacroix noted that there were several opportunities to respond to mounting mine action needs this year. He appealed to MASG members to take advantage of them by:

- urging the compliance of all parties to conflict with relevant international law
- raising the visibility of mine action as an enabler of stabilization and development, and reflecting this role in relevant plans and budgets
- supporting mine action programmes through predictable, flexible, and adequate funding
- making contributions to the UN VTF to support a rapid and coherent multilateral humanitarian response to risks posed by mines and explosive remnants of war.

Mr Lacroix concluded by thanking Ambassador Massari for chairing a meeting on Ukraine and food security in February this year, and asked that the MASG consider more such events at the UN Headquarters in New York, for example during Protection of Civilians week in May; on the needs of survivors of an explosive ordnance accident during the Sixteenth Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in June; or during the Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict in June. Mr Lacroix also drew the attention of the meeting to the recent GA Resolution on Assistance in Mine Action, and the revised UN Mine Action Strategy.

The full statement by USG Lacroix can be found on the MASG website.

2. BRIEFINGS: REGIONAL MINE ACTION

2.1 Gaza – Mr Charles Birch, Chief of Mine Action Programme, UNMAS Palestine. Mr Birch started by giving a timeline of the UN mine action activities and responses since last October, including the UN Resident Coordinator designating UNMAS as the official mine action coordination and tasking body inside Gaza, in the absence of a functioning national authority. Mr Birch explained that although Gaza is quite small, the population is 87% urbanized, thus the amount of building damage and rubble is huge, which will lead to difficult and slow EOD survey and clearance. To date, UNMAS has secured \$5 million in donor support, and although no one has done an assessment in the North, they estimate they will potentially need \$40 million for the initial response, including clearance – and potentially hundreds of millions for the longer-term clearance and rebuilding efforts. Mr Birch then outlined the progress made against the four pillars of the UNMAS Palestine Programme Activities. They are;

1. Pillar One - Support to Humanitarian Security
2. Pillar Two - Explosive Hazard Response
3. Pillar Three - Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE)
4. Pillar Four - Coordination

In concluding, Mr Birch outlined the upcoming and ongoing needs, and thanked the EU, Japan and OCHA for funding for Gaza, and New Zealand and OCHA for the West Bank.

The power point presentation on Gaza is available on the MASG website.

2.2 Ukraine.

2.2.1 Mr Ihor Bezkaravainyi – Deputy Minister of Economy, Ukraine. Mr Bezkaravainyi gave a brief overview of the national mine action coordination measures currently being undertaken in Ukraine. He said that following a six-month inclusive process among partners, a ten-year National Mine Action Strategy had been finalized, and it was expected to be signed by the President in the near future. The Strategy focusses on three strategic objectives; land release, protection of the people and system improvement. A complementary Implementation Plan has also been developed, to provide clarity on the action points needed to achieve the objectives. The Plan will be updated every three years, based on progress made and lessons learned. Two different coordination groups have been formed – one involving donors and the other involving monthly meetings at the operational level. This latter group was important as there are now over 40 organizations, both local and international, working in the mine action sector. Finally, Mr Bezkaravainyi said that due to the huge scale of the problem, prioritization was essential. An automatic prioritization system based on economic, social, and environmental data is being developed, to ensure that mine action work boosts the economy and looks after citizens interests. The Government also needs a ‘register of needs’ to connect priorities with equipment and vehicle needs, for example.

2.2.2 UN Ukraine – Mr Paul Heslop, Mine Action Programme Manager, Kyiv. Mr Heslop said that he was speaking on behalf of the UN family in Ukraine, and he noted the excellent cooperation and coordination between UN agencies in-country. Mr Heslop outlined the improvements over the past 12 months, in areas like acceptance of a risk management approach, establishing a sectoral working group, relaunching of the Mine Action AOR, and promoting the use of technology. The priorities for

2024 included assisting with the implementation of the National Strategy, expansion of capacity and data driven prioritization. Mr Heslop noted that coordination was more complex because of the involvement of other, non-traditional mine action agencies, such as NATO, EU and OSCE. Mr Heslop then outlined the ongoing challenges to the sector and the next steps planned to be taken by the UN. Finally, Mr Heslop stressed that the situation in Ukraine was unique, in that mine and UXO clearance of agricultural land and will not only benefit Ukraine, but also the rest of the world due to lower food and energy prices.

Discussion. The representative of Germany reminded the meeting that the 3rd Recovery Conference for Ukraine would be held in Berlin during 11 and 12 October 2024. The representative of Switzerland also noted that they would be hosting a conference on mine action in Ukraine from 17 to 18 October 2024 in Lausanne.

The two power point presentations on Ukraine are available on the MASG website.

2.3 Ethiopia. Ms Francesca Chiaudani – Chief of Mine Action Programme, UNMAS. Ms Chiaudani outlined the scale of the explosive contamination problem in Ethiopia, which included legacy contamination across border areas, and noted that 7 out of 11 regions in the country were affected. The 2020-2022 conflict in Tigray and recent spillover of conflicts to neighboring regions have added a new layer of contamination. Nearly 70% of the more recent contamination was in agricultural areas, especially in Tigray. In terms of national coordination, she noted that the Ethiopian Mine Action Office has new management and few resources, and that the UN would provide training and equipment support. The UN has also undertaken EO assessments and implemented Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) programmes with partners. Six international organizations have applied to work in the country and are close to obtaining accreditation. HALO Trust currently work in the Somali border area. Ms Chiaudani noted that the UN has sufficient funding for its activities this year, but not yet for 2025, and concluded by outlining some key messages for the donor community, including the need for;

- Long term, consistent funding
- Advocacy for mine action into humanitarian allocations
- Building the capacity of local actors
- Support and advocacy for understanding humanitarian mine action at all levels
- Prioritization of the need for training of non-technical survey teams.

The power point presentation on Ethiopia is available on the MASG website.

3. BRIEFINGS: THEMATIC UPDATES

3.1 The Landmine Problem in Azerbaijan: Human Solidarity and International Cooperation in Action – Ambassador Qaya Mammadov, Head Political-Military Affairs, MFA, and Mr Vugar Suleymanov, Chair, ANAMA. Ambassador Mammadov thanked the MASG and the Italian chair for the inclusion of his country’s problem in the MASG agenda. He also thanked all the donors for their support of mine action in Azerbaijan. He outlined the extent of the explosive contamination in the country, and said it was estimated that 12% of the country’s territory was affected with 1.5 million landmines. He then outlined four reasons for donors to prioritize supporting Azerbaijan. These were; *firstly* for humanitarian reasons, to reduce casualties and allow close to 1 million internally displaced people (IDP) to return home, *secondly* for peace and reconciliation reasons – a speedy demining and return of IDPs will help lasting peace, *thirdly* to be part of a success story – Azerbaijan’s demining is a well-organized process and any support will have a meaningful difference; and *fourthly* any support will have a multiplying effect; once Azerbaijan has cleared its territories, it will be able to assist other countries. He also informed of Azerbaijan’s contributions to international dialogue and cooperation on demining, like the establishment of the UNDP-ANAMA international mine action training centre, highlighting impact of landmines on cultural heritage sites, and advocating for inclusion of landmine issue in the SDG process. Ambassador Mammadov noted that Azerbaijan would be hosting its annual, international mine action conference, jointly organized with the UN, from 30 to 31 May this year and invited donors to attend. Finally, he also said that this year’s conference will be devoted to highlighting the adverse impact of explosive contamination on the environment, which aligns with Azerbaijan’s role as COP29 chair.

Mr Suleymanov then spoke on behalf of the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA). He also thanked donors for their support. He then outlined that landmines posed an indiscriminate risk to the population, particularly in rural areas, and that the Government needed to show solidarity with the people. Despite strong Government support, ANAMA still requires international funding support and technical assistance, but it is able to share expertise in the region. The work of ANAMA will shape the future legacy of the country.

3.2 Innovative Financing in Mine Action – Ambassador Stefano Toscano, Director GICHD.

Ambassador Toscano opened by saying that in mine action the needs always exceed the available resources. He said that while the continued use of traditional funding streams remains essential for the sector, it is important to continue to strengthen good humanitarian donorship while also seeking alternatives to complement these traditional funding streams – notably innovative finance mechanisms. In this regard, the GICHD had conducted a study called “Innovative Finance for Mine Action: Needs and Potential Solutions”. Among the key findings was that despite an all-time high of contributions to mine action in 2022 at over \$700 million, over 20% of this went to Ukraine, leaving all other programmes at funding levels below 2017 levels. He also noted that while 60 countries and territories are reported to remain contaminated with explosive ordnance, since 2011, more than 50% of the total funding recorded went to the top five recipient countries and territories.

Ambassador Toscano went on to say that the study defines innovative finance for mine action as *initiatives that make use of financial mechanisms to channel public and private funds to help narrow*

the funding gap for mine action and complement existing funding arrangements in a way that fosters equity, sustainability, efficiency, and effectiveness. He said the study explores two mechanisms that have been successful in other humanitarian aid and development assistance sectors and could be applied to mine action: they are 'Front Loading' and 'Thematic Bonds'. He then went on to explain how these two mechanisms could work.

Finally, Ambassador Toscano outlined the main conclusions from the study and outlined the next steps, including the launch of the study at the NDM-UN on 1 May and saying that it will also be available on the GICHD website. The GICHD is organizing, alongside the Humanitarian Finance Forum and the Mine Action Finance Initiative (MAFI), a virtual roundtable on 21 May 2024 to discuss the potential for the application of the front-loading mechanism to the mine action sector. This event will include stakeholders from the development finance sector, including the current Chair of IFFIm and the former Treasurer of the World Bank. The GICHD is also collaborating with MAFI and the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine to develop and pilot innovative finance mechanisms for the Ukraine context, with the aim to scale the mechanisms for the entire mine action sector. The Ministry of Economy will be participating in the roundtable and the GICHD will be outlining together the next steps following this.

The full statement by Ambassador Toscano is available on the MASG website.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 The Chair advised that the next meeting of the MASG will be held in-person at the Italian Mission to the UN in New York in October 2024.

5. MEETING CLOSE

The Chair thanked MASG members and observers for their participation in the meeting. He reminded MASG members that Italy's tenure as chair of the MASG would finish at the end of 2024, and he asked other members to consider taking on the role. He also thanked Switzerland for hosting the NDM-27 and the USA for funding the post of MASG secretary, and thanked Mr Mansfield for his work in preparing the meeting. He also thanked all the presenters and speakers and said that the minutes of the meeting and the presentations would be made available shortly.

The meeting closed at 18.00 hours (CEST)

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