

MINUTES

MINE ACTION SUPPORT GROUP

WEDNESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2019

UNITED STATES PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS, GENEVA

1. WELCOME

The Chair of the MASG, Mr Stanley L. Brown, Director of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) in the U.S. Department of State opened the meeting at 13.00 hours and welcomed all participants. He then invited the two keynote speakers to address the meeting – Ambassador Robert A. Wood, the Permanent Representative of the United States to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and Ms Agnes Marcaillou, Director UNMAS and Chair of the Inter-Agency Group – Mine Action (IACG-MA).

1.1 Ambassador Robert A. Wood (USA). Ambassador Wood said that the US Mission in Geneva was pleased to host the MASG again this year. He noted that US leadership in mine action demonstrates the United States commitment to international peace and security, through both foreign assistance and robust diplomacy. However, the US is not alone and through the MASG and other similar initiatives, the US can work with like-minded states, civil society and the UN toward a safer and more peaceful world.

Ambassador Wood stressed that dialogue and constructive cooperation remain essential to the United States work in disarmament, arms control and mine action alike. While multi-lateral negotiations can sometimes take a long time, discussions on implementation in the field can lead to immediate benefits in terms of safety and security of internally displaced people and refugees in post conflict areas. Whatever the challenge, be it dealing with IEDs in a post-conflict stabilization setting or clearing mines and ERW from past conflicts, the goals are the same. Ambassador Wood noted that the humanitarian mine action community serves as a model for how different actors can work towards a common end. In closing Ambassador Wood thanked the MASG for their work and wished the participants well for the meeting.

1.2 Ms Agnes Marcaillou. Ms Marcaillou thanked Ambassador Wood for hosting the meeting and the United States for its continued leadership as it enters its second year as chair of the MASG. Speaking on behalf of the Chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action (IACG-MA), Ms Marcaillou said that the United Nations was in a period of reform and of new opportunity with the realization of the Secretary-General's ambitious reform agenda. The UN has ushered in a new era for multi-lateral mine action with the recent launch of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy 2019 – 2023 (and which had been presented to the MASG at the last meeting in October 2018). The Strategy represents a deepening of the UN's approach to mine action, with a strong emphasis on risk mitigation, assistance to victims and survivors, protection, gender, national capacity development and, broadly speaking, achievement of the SDGs. It also elaborates how mine action continues to be integrated within broader humanitarian, peace and security and development frameworks.

Ms Marcaillou noted that the UN General Assembly has called on all parts of the UN system to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in their mandates and to ensure that commitments on paper lead to progress on the ground. In response to this call, the IACG-MA has just completed an update of the UN Gender Guidelines for Mine Action, which are intended to provide practical steps to mainstream gender and promote gender equality in mine action programmes. On other topics, Ms Marcaillou continued by saying that the rapid removal of hazardous explosive devices in urban areas is a pre-requisite for the safe return of displaced people and the restoration of basic services. Mine action is also recognized as an important confidence building measure in peace building and sustainment.

Ms Marcaillou concluded by saying that the UN will need the support of donors, both political and financial, to operationalize the Strategy and guide the work of the UN over the next five years. She said that it was important to avoid a lack of coherence and duplication of effort, whether in the UN system or outside. Ms Marcaillou thanked her UN partners, national authorities and other operators for their support and for highlighting the sector's needs on a global basis.

1.3. Mr Stanley L. Brown – MASG Chair. Mr Brown thanked both the keynote speakers and outlined the agenda for the meeting. In setting the scene for the meeting, Mr Brown noted that global mine action needs outstrip the available resources. Although the Landmine Monitor 2018 reported a 38% increase in funding, this additional funding came from a very few donors for specific purposes in the Middle East, and it was not expected to be sustained. Mr Brown also noted the positive news that the Landmine Monitor reported a decrease in new landmine casualties. Finally, Mr Brown reaffirmed that the MASG was an invaluable forum to allow donors to understand each other's mine action policies and priorities.

2. UNITED NATIONS BRIEFINGS

2.1. Somalia. The UNMAS Programme Manager for Somalia, Ms Qurat-ul-Ain Sadozai, gave a presentation on the impact of mines and explosives hazards on the youth and women of Somalia. With ongoing armed conflict, the threat of explosive hazards is growing, which forces many youth and women to become IDPs or refugees. There are 114 confirmed and 65 suspected minefields in the country, along with 47 sq km of battle areas. Civilians remain the primary victim of explosive hazards and over the past five years 2,638 civilians were victims of IEDs and another 221 civilians were victims of landmines. Unemployment and social marginalization are key drivers of instability in Somalia. Over 50% of the population in Somalia is below the age of 15 years and two thirds of all youth are unemployed. Mine action is a job intensive sector and the UNMAS strategy is to create jobs for women and youth, infuse resources into the community and promote skills training. Ms Sadozai gave some examples of successful projects employing women and youth, such as stockpile destruction tasks, clearance of the national stadium, roadside brush clearance and the training of female medics. In conclusion, Ms Sadozai said that explosive hazards are a threat, but they can be used as an opportunity, particularly by empowering marginalized youth and women.

The representative of Switzerland asked about the recording of victim data, particularly whether the IED or other devices that caused an injury fell under the definition of the APMBC. Ms Sadozai said that the Government owns the data base and the mine action operators provide the data. At present, a distinction is not made on the type of device that causes an accident, but UNMAS is having discussions with the Government about disaggregating data. Ms Marcaillou noted that at the

NDM-UN, the Government of Somalia had spoken about meeting its commitment to IHL and providing support to victims.

2.2 The Territory of Western Sahara. The UNMAS Programme Manager for Western Sahara, Mr Leon Louw, gave an update on the situation in Western Sahara. Mr Louw said that the situation in Western Sahara was not often covered by the media, but that UNMAS works on the Eastern side of a 1,465 km sand berm dividing the Territory of Western Sahara, and which is heavily contaminated by cluster munitions and other ERW. A range of international and national operators undertake projects funded by the VTF on risk education, survey, clearance, VA, PSSM and advocacy. The UN Assessed Budget covers clearance and route verification to enable MINURSO military observers safe passage to monitor the ceasefire. The work of UNMAS is in line with the new UN Mine Action Strategy and aims for an end state in 2023. Clearance teams have cleared over 45,000 devices in the past ten years. Cattle herding is one of the most important local activities and overall the work being undertaken by the United Nations aligns with 11 of the 17 SDGs. The challenges remaining include; lack of funding, that no records were kept of cluster munition or landmine use, the area is sparsely inhabited, extreme weather conditions and the local political and security challenges.

A question was asked about the level of confidence in survey activities and the remaining level of threat. Mr Louw responded by saying that survey activities are ongoing, but that most contaminated areas are known. The IMSMA data base is being used to record hazardous areas. The representative of Ireland asked about projects to assist victims, and Mr Louw said that a micro-project to provide livestock to survivors has had a positive impact in helping survivors and their families to support themselves. When asked if the 2023 clearance target covered all areas of the country, Mr Louw said that it only applied to those areas east of the berm.

2.3 Yemen. Mr Stephen Bryant, the UNDP Chief Technical Adviser, spoke about the situation in Yemen. He described the current political situation in the country and outlined which groups controlled the different parts of the country. He said that of a population of 28 million people, 8.4 million were on the brink of starvation and that a total of 24 million people needed some form of humanitarian assistance. While there was continuous fighting going on, e.g. around al Huydaydah, the front lines remained static. Mr Bryant explained that the threat included landmines, improvised devices and cluster munitions. Concerns included local anti-tank mines being produced on an industrial scale, increased use of pressure plate IEDs and large numbers of PPM-2 anti-personnel mines (which were never part of Yemen's original stockpiles). While local Yemeni clearance teams are available, they cannot work due to security concerns. For 2019, UNDP is looking to establish a mine action coordination centre and introduce international NGOs and companies to fill knowledge gaps and to train local operators.

Mr Abraham Achiek from UNICEF then spoke about the work they were doing in Yemen. He said that UNICEF was undertaking risk education programmes and in 2018 they had reached 1.5 million people across 20 governorates. It was difficult to get accurate information, but the UN had verified figures that 582 children had been killed or injured by mines/ERW between 2015 and 2018. MRE projects are being conducted on an emergency basis and through schools. UNICEF also expanded victim assistance services to children who lost limbs – through two prosthesis and rehabilitation centres in Aden and Taizz governorates. Other support includes transport and medication for victims. Mr Achiek stressed that the impact of the war in Yemen is overwhelming and that access to

provide services is often difficult, and that some areas remain physically inaccessible. UNICEF appreciated the support it receives from donors and said that it needs ongoing assistance.

The Netherlands asked about how mine action would fit into peace plans in Yemen and also asked about the cost of using commercial companies, as it sounded expensive. Mr Bryant said that mine action was part of the peace plan outlined in the UN Security Council resolution. He said that commercial companies can provide a quick response and short term expertise and then the plan would be to scale them back and use local YEMAC staff (as the law requires).

2.4 The Effects of Landmines and UXO on Refugees and Migration – UNHCR. The Chair introduced Ms Grainne O’Hara, the Deputy Director of International Protection at UNHCR. Ms O’Hara explained that UNHCR was chair of the Global Protection Cluster within the UN system, and that the sub-cluster on mine action is chaired by UNMAS. Ms O’Hara underscored the strong partnership across the UN in support of protection and advancing conducive conditions for the return of displaced persons. UNHCR is also a member of the IACG-MA and also a partner in implementing the UN Mine Action Strategy. Overall, in 2017 UNHCR noted an upward trend of displacement and a slowing trend of return. This was mainly due to protracted conflicts with no political solutions in sight. Ms O’Hara then gave some examples where landmines and other ERW affected refugees, such as Somalia and Western Sahara. She also spoke about Yemen where there was massive internal movement of people, but not big outflows. Yemen was a traditional transit point/migration route from countries like Ethiopia and Eritrea, and this movement was still continuing. Ms O’Hara explained that UNHCR have two points of entry in mine action, the first is that the use of explosive devices is part of the reason that drives people to leave their homes, and secondly that they need strong mine action programmes to encourage return. UNHCR is an active partner in mine action to promote return and to enable people to resume their livelihoods in order to stay. Return is not sustainable without mine action.

The representative of Germany noted that the protection aspect of mine action is not well noted in the humanitarian dialogue and pledging conferences, and asked how mine action was reflected in Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP). Germany also asked what more can be done in this regard. The representative of Norway appreciated that UNHCR gave priority to mine action. Norway asked about neighbouring countries around Syria, and also asked about the effect on returns if the risk of explosives threat is overlapped. Ms O’Hara replied that although UNHCR led the Protection Cluster they ensured that the voices of other cluster members are heard, including NGOs and host Governments. She did not have the sense that mine action is overlooked and noted that UNMAS, UNICEF and other relevant agencies are represented in the cluster, although accepted that more work could be done to ensure integration of these issues in HRPs. Ms Marcaillou highlighted progress in this regard, while also noting challenging in reflecting mine action requirements comprehensively within HRPs and underscoring the importance of donor advocacy in this regards. On Syria, Ms O’Hara said that spontaneous return of IDPs and refugees had already started and that MRE is one of the first steps to be implemented in neighbouring countries. UNHCR rely on their partners like UNMAS and UNICEF in this regard and gave the example of successful MRE programmes delivered by these agencies’ in Afghanistan. The representative of Italy said that it was clear that all parties should give more attention to mine action at the start of any planning process for the Protection Cluster, and this point was reinforced by Ms Marcaillou.

3. COUNTRY BRIEFINGS

3.1 Bosnia. Mr Asim Dorovic, Counsellor at the Mission of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Geneva noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina is still the most mine affected country in Europe, with 1,018 km² (or roughly 2% of the total size of the country) contaminated with mines and explosive remnants of war. The landmine problem directly impacts 545,000 inhabitants or 15% of the population. Since the end of the war there have been 1758 mine casualties, 614 of which were fatal. However, he said that there is good news in that Bosnia and Herzegovina has succeeded in clearing more than two thirds of its suspected hazardous areas - from 4,200sqkm in 1996 to a little over 1,000sqkm today. The Government has also strengthened its national mine action resources and a prime example of this was the fact that the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina account for 20-25% of total annual demining results. Bosnia and Herzegovina is also successfully implementing a new mine action methodology in regards to land release – called “evidence based survey”.

In October 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina organized a National Mine Action Stakeholder Dialogue, with the main goal to bring stakeholders together to identify challenges and accelerate actions to implement the mine clearance aspects of the 2014-2019 Maputo Action Plan. The Conference was used to present donors with the new mine action plan and strategy – ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina Free of Mines by 2025’. Bosnia and Herzegovina has also started implementing a Country Assessment project reviewing all mine suspected areas. The objective is to increase the efficiency of land release, and through the Country Assessment better quantify the remaining size and impact of mines/explosive remnants of war contamination. Implementing partners of the project are Norwegian People’s Aid, BHMIC and the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnia and Herzegovina has also submitted an APMBIC Article V extension request for a two year extension – with the goal of implementing the Country Assessment by mid-2020, by when the BHMIC will be in a better position to plan the fulfillment its Convention obligations.

Mr Dorovic then outlined some challenges facing the country. These included funding related issues, upgrading the national information management system and revising the BHMIC mine action prioritization procedures. On funding, Mr Dorovic said that the BHMIC has calculated that the implementation of the new strategy to make the country landmine free by 2025 requires an amount of 336 million Bosnian Marks (US\$197 million). He noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina is doing as much as it can, and the ratio of local versus donor funding is about 50/50. Finally, Mr Dorovic thanked all the MASG members for their cooperation and assistance and hoped that they would continue to support Bosnia and Herzegovina in their endeavor of becoming a mine free country.

3.2 Sri Lanka. The Chair welcomed to the meeting Ambassador Abdul Azeez, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN and Mr V. Sivagnanasothy, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Resettlement and Rehabilitation. Mr Sivagnanasothy said that Sri Lanka has cleared or reduced the originally estimated Suspected Hazardous Area in Sri Lanka from 1,302 sq km to 25 sq km. Through this Sri Lanka has been able to resettle 258,000 families and provide access to roads, schools, hospitals paddy fields and increase livelihood opportunities. The Government aims to clear the remaining area of 25 sq km by 2020, but this will require an additional US\$20million. An individualized approach to mobilize funds for Sri Lanka is felt as important at this juncture. Targeted MRE programmes have been successful in changing behaviour and reducing the incidence of

casualties, including special MRE for school children, metal scrap collectors, fire food collectors, garbage burners, and resettlers who are clearing the bush by burning.

Mr Sivagnanasothy also said that an inter-ministerial committee has been established to review all components of the mine action programme, including victim assistance. A cabinet paper has been prepared to further strengthen the inter-ministerial committee and to ensure the national mine action centre is operationally further strengthened to ensure delivery of the expected results. The cabinet paper also seeks additional budgetary support for victim assistance. A donor meeting is to be scheduled soon to mobilize resources to meet the mine clearance targets and an impact assessment methodology is being worked out with GICHD. Sri Lanka appreciates the support from its international partners and is motivated to be mine free by the due date.

4. UPDATES FROM MASG OBSERVERS

4.1 GICHD. The Director of the GICHD, Ambassador Stefano Toscano spoke on the topic of ‘Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and the Urban Environment’. He noted that conflicts in cities have become the norm in recent years. This is worrisome because the human suffering that results from war being waged in city streets is far more significant than 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. In the past urban areas tended to be cleared quickly, and the mine action sector’s long-term work rapidly moved out into rural settings – where most of the contamination would be found.

Today, the challenge is double because mine action has to deal with high levels of contamination in cities, and much of the explosive contamination is of an improvised nature. Dealing with IEDs is dangerous and challenging because of their unpredictable nature, and 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 by the number of accidents that have occurred while organizations have been dealing with IEDs. Because IEDs are not easily recognizable, risk education programmes must be tailored to teach people about the complex scenarios where IEDs are found. Ambassador Toscano noted the good progress being made with the recent approval, under the chairmanship of UNMAS, of the IMAS on IED Disposal, and another on building clearance. These new standards will help operators in many ways, including standardized reporting and terminology. Other activities that have proven difficult in urban areas are general assessments, mapping, prioritization and tasking. The challenge is to correctly estimate the size of hazardous areas and to make full use of GIS, including data from other sectors.

In conclusion Ambassador Toscano stressed the need for good coordination and reflected 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.

4.2 MAG/HALO – Landmine Free 2025. The co-coordinators of the ‘Landmine Free 2025’ campaign, Ms Camille Wallen (HALO Trust) and Mr Chris Loughran (MAG) said that the aim of the campaign was to re-energize the mine action sector to achieve the goals of the Maputo APMBC Review Conference. They stressed the pragmatic nature of the campaign and they do not expect all countries will be mine free by 2025, but of the current 61 affected States or territories, most are not on track to meet their deadlines. A chart giving an analysis of the barriers to completion for certain countries was distributed and explained. Examples were given of Sri Lanka, Angola and Bosnia as countries who could achieve completion with some additional assistance. It was noted that at the last APMBC MSP all parties were urged to get behind the campaign and that by the time of the Oslo Review Conference later this year, there will only be six years left until 2025. They suggested that donors could help by encouraging in-country cooperation working together under government frameworks, increased funding, political encouragement and campaigning to get the job done.

In question time, Ms Marcaillou reminded the meeting that UNMAS produce the annual Portfolio of Mine Action Projects, which reflects affected countries funding needs and complements the work of the 2025 campaign. UNMAS are extending the life of the Portfolio on a temporary basis pending a review of its effectiveness. The Director of the GICHD said that things like the existence of national mine action strategies and extension requests were also key indicators of affected governments’ commitment. While he agreed that the 2025 campaign is re-energizing the sector, the key to sustaining long term funding was linking mine action to other sectors, like peace and security, development and humanitarian assistance.

4.3 JMU/CISR. Dr Suzanne Fiederlein reminded MASG members that the Centre for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR) at James Madison University acts as a clearing house for sharing mine action data, and noted that 2019 was the 23rd year of publication of the Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction. Last year CISR launched the on-line ‘Global CWD Repository’ which is a free, publicly accessible, document storage and sharing tool for material related to conventional weapons destruction and mine action. More recently, CISR has launched the Accident and Incident Data-base (AID) which aims to gather and store information about demining workplace accidents. This will build on previous attempts to gather such data, and Ms Fiederlein encouraged national authorities and demining operators to provide anonymous data on demining accidents. Finally, Ms Fiederlein said that the next Mine Action Senior Managers Course will be held at CISR in September 2019.

4.4 ITF Enhancing Human Security. 4.4 ITF Enhancing Human Security. The Director, Ambassador Lovrenčić updated the meeting on the work of ITF – Enhancing Human Security. He said in the 20 years the organisation has been operating, it has worked closely with a large number of donors and had funded the clearance of millions of square metres of affected land and prevented accidents. The ITF is looking to expand its range of donor partners and has recently initiated cooperation with Austria and the United Arab Emirates, and they particularly want to fund mine action linked to wider security, stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction. New donors to the ITF will encourage other interested donor countries to join in and noted that the European Union is also looking at ways to

act through ITF. The ITF aims to work on better ways for financial burden sharing among donor countries in mine action.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 Next Meeting of the MASG. Although not discussed at the meeting, the next meeting of the MASG will be held in early-October 2019 at the United States Mission to the United Nations in New York.

6. MEETING CLOSE

In closing the Chair invited the Director UNMAS to say some final remarks. Ms Marcaillou emphasized the strong cooperation between the MASG and the United Nations system. She reminded the meeting that early planning for mine action interventions was the key and that the United Nations has the expertise and resources to undertake this. Ms Marcaillou also noted that the United Nations and donors were working in the same countries and encouraged ongoing dialogue to work better together and to align strategies. Finally, Ms Marcaillou thanked the donors for their ongoing support to the UN.

Mr Brown thanked all members for attending and also thanked the presenters of the various topics. He reminded meeting participants that the goal of the MASG is to focus on mine action in the field and to help civil society to recover from conflict. Finally, Mr Brown said that copies of all statements and presentations from today's meeting would be posted on the MASG website once the minutes are finalized

The meeting closed at 15.45 hours.

25 Mar 19