

MINUTES

MINE ACTION SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

THURSDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2016

ROOM XXVII, UNITED NATIONS PALAIS DES NATIONS, GENEVA

1. WELCOMING REMARKS BY CHAIR

The Chair of the MASG, Ambassador Inigo Lambertini, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations (in New York) opened the meeting at 13.00 hours and welcomed the MASG members to the meeting. He also extended a welcome to Ms Agnès Marcaillou, the Director of UNMAS and to all MASG observer organizations.

The Chair then made a series of opening remarks. The first was to thank Japan, on behalf of all the MASG members, for their work as Chair of the MASG for the past two years. Ambassador Lambertini noted that under the Japanese Chair they had kept up the schedule of regular MASG meetings, introduced some new members to the MASG, hosted a number of special meetings and arranged a successful field visit to Colombia. Italy is pleased to be taking over from Japan as Chair and will endeavour to continue on from their good work. The Chair also took the opportunity to thank the United States for their funding of the MASG Secretariat position, which helps the MASG maintain continuity and consistency with its work.

In preparation for assuming the Chair of the MASG, Italy has drafted a short paper outlining their plans for the MASG for the next two years. A draft will be circulated in due course, but the main points proposed by Italy are as follows;

- Continue facilitating the exchange of information about mine action amongst MASG members and to make MASG meetings as interactive as possible
- Maintain the focus of the MASG on support to the United Nations, but also on supporting mine affected countries and other organizations, as appropriate
- Encourage effective coordination and partnerships among donors, agencies and mine action operators
- Support efforts aimed at the completion of the various Convention obligations
- Use the MASG as a venue to discuss new ideas or trends in mine action

Next, Ambassador Lambertini said he would like to say a few words about his own country, Italy, and its recent support to mine action. In 2015, Italian funds dedicated to mine action activities amounted to over 3.4 million Euros, well above the annual average. Out of this amount, Italy has already disbursed 2.7 million Euros in the current year for the implementation of several projects in Colombia, Sudan, the Gaza Strip and Syria (from Turkey). The unspent resources are already planned to support UNMAS projects in Iraq and Libya in early 2016, as soon as the political situation on the ground will allow it. As one of the 10 biggest donors in mine action, Italy looks forward to enhancing

its collaboration with UNMAS to discuss mine action policies and to better organize upcoming meetings here in Geneva, as well as in New York.

Ambassador Lambertini went on to say that Italy is undertaking a reform process which led to the creation of an autonomous body named the “Italian Agency for Development Cooperation” which, under the supervision of the Foreign Minister, will be in charge of the implementation of the demining projects. This reform process is accompanied by both a substantial increase of the Italian ODA (Official Development Aid) and a simplification of financial disbursement procedures. Italy is confident therefore that it will maintain, and possibly increase, its financial support to mine action activities. For 2016, the total budget of Italy for mine action activities will be around 3.35 million Euros.

Finally, the Chair noted that the minutes of the last MASG meeting, which was held on 9 October 2015 in New York, were circulated for comment shortly after that meeting. The minutes were finalized and distributed to MASG members on the 5th November 2015 and posted on the MASG website.

The Chair the outlined the agenda for today’s meeting, noting that due to the short time available members and observers had been requested to provide their regular updates in written form to the secretariat. A copy of the agenda of the meeting, the list of attendees and the document ‘Future work of the MASG 2015 – 2016’ is attached to these minutes.

2. COUNTRY AND THEMATIC UPDATES

2.1 Iraq. The first presentation was an update on the situation in Iraq, provided by Mr Imad Abdul Baki, the UNMAS Programme Manager for Iraq. Mr Baki noted that extensive conflict in Iraq had led to significant contamination from Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Many of the IEDs used improvised pressure plate switches and the areas where they were laid made them similar to minefields. At the request of the UN SRSG and DSRSG/HC/RC for Iraq and the Iraqi Authorities, UNMAS deployed to Iraq in June 2015 to assess the scale of newly identified explosive threats, including IEDs, in areas re-taken from Daesh. To date the UNMAS activities have included;

- Train/advise/mentor civilian EOD and IED clearance teams in Baghdad and Erbil
- Conduct comprehensive threat assessments in re-taken areas
- Develop and enhance national capacities in IED defeat, mitigation and clearance, supported by international technical experts where needed
- Assist national authorities to manage/coordinate a response to IEDs and IED threat mitigation policies/procedures.
- Support the voluntary return of internally displaced persons
- Facilitate stabilization, humanitarian response and early recovery

Mr Baki then went on to highlight some of the challenges they faced, which included working in a high risk and non-traditional humanitarian environment, the massive scale of the contamination, the political pressure to deliver results in newly re-taken areas and the need for multi-year support from donors. In outlining the way ahead, Mr Baki said that initial UNMAS assessments of the IED threat and of available national capacities have enabled a 'bespoke' training and mentoring package to be developed, in coordination with other partners. Funding had been secured for initial training/mentoring of national/regional authorities in IEDD, but multi-year support will be needed. He noted that international focus on 'recently liberated' areas is extremely high, particularly on Ramadi, but there is little local capacity to deal with the threat and costs will be high. UNMAS will continue to support sustainability and 'mentor' deployment into the re-taken areas by local partners (following training), and to use commercial companies for emergency clearance.

The Chair then invited questions or comments from the meeting. France mentioned that they will fund some clearance work in Iraq in 2016, particularly in areas inhabited by religious minorities, and that they would be happy to discuss this approach with partners. The United Kingdom asked about the extent of the contamination and the need for survey, and Italy asked about the impact of political pressure on the work. Canada asked about the relationship between the National Mine Action Authority in Baghdad and the Iraqi Kurdish Mine Action (IKMA) centre in the North.

Mr Baki replied by saying that informal reports suggest that the ERW contamination problem in the country is massive and that it will need continuous survey and threat assessments to build up an accurate picture. UNMAS is working with other partners, like UNDP and other local organizations, to support humanitarian assistance and the return of IDPs to their home towns. Mr Baki said that the cooperation between the NMAA in Baghdad and IKMA looks positive and that they coordinate closely. In some 'grey areas' of responsibility they have put aside political differences and have signed an MoU to cover work in these locations. In terms of training local agencies it was still early days, but they were talking to agencies like the police and civil defence to identify training needs.

Ms Marcaillou acknowledged the political pressure to respond quickly in re-taken areas. However, she noted that a complex IED situation existed in Ramadi and the 17 other areas that had been re-taken. UNMAS will partner with other agencies and work as quickly as possible to strengthen local capacities, but they would not endanger Iraqi lives or compromise on safety.

2.2 Syria. Ms Sarah Marshall, the UNMAS Programme Manager for Syria, provided an update on the situation in Syria. Ms Marshall explained that after nearly six years of conflict the presence of mines, ERW, IEDs, artisanal mines, booby traps and cluster munitions pose a grave threat to the Syrian population. While urban areas are the targets of most attacks, landmine related incidents are more frequently recorded in the countryside. The presence of explosive contamination is endangering the lives and livelihoods of the population, restricts freedom of movement, is a barrier to the access to basic needs and prevents the safe deployment of aid.

The UN Mine Action Sub-Cluster coordinates activities within the country and for refugees in neighbouring countries. To date activities have included traditional mine and ERW clearance, non-traditional clearance, risk education, victim assistance and the development of, and assistance to, local capacities. This latter activity is needed as often local people with no training have attempted to deal with the ERW problem themselves, which has resulted in many casualties. Some

international NGOs have partnered with Syrian organizations to help strengthen their capacity. Other innovative approaches include the use of pyro-technic torches to burn mines or ERW that are found, because it is impossible for local organizations to get explosives into the country to blow up the mines. Ms Marshall also stressed the policy of ‘anonymization’ to ensure that local organizations or the lives of individuals working in the mine action sector are not put at risk.

Following Ms Marshall’s presentation, Ms Marcaillou noted that the mine action response in Syria underscored the efficiency of the United Nation system in responding to humanitarian emergencies and that numerous UN agencies, including UNDP and OCHA, were involved in a well-coordinated response. The representative of UNICEF noted that they were working with the Ministry of Education to provide risk education and that their main concern was of course vulnerable children. UNICEF also chaired the MRE and ERW working group. The representative of Japan asked what the percentage the 14 tonnes of ERW that had been destroyed in Kobane represented of the total, and also what was the situation in Homs and Al-Hasakeh. Ms Marshall replied that Kobane was unusual due to its proximity to the border and the large number of people returning to the area – where many locals were collecting or clearing ERW. UNMAS was surveying 300 villages around the Kobane area. It was difficult to assess with accuracy the situation in other parts of the country due to restrictions on travel by international staff. Ad hoc work was being undertaken by locals in many parts of the country, but the anecdotal reports were difficult to confirm.

2.3 Yemen. Ms Shoko Shimozawa, the Deputy Director MENA, UNHCR gave an update on the situation in Yemen from the perspective of UNHCR. She noted that the ongoing conflict had caused a large number of civilian casualties, damage to infrastructure and that it was estimated that up to 2.5 million people were internally displaced. Ms Shimozawa also said that Yemen had historically been a ‘transit country’ for migration and surprisingly this flow of people had increased recently, despite the ongoing violence. UNHCR and IOM regularly conduct household and community surveys to determine needs and to advise on what is available. UNHCR is working with the national Mine Action Committee and requests clearance and certification of areas where refugees are returning. They are also advising on the need for risk education on the key migratory routes.

Mr Stephen Bryant, the mine action adviser for UNDP Yemen, noted that the nature of the mine, UXO and cluster munition situation in Yemen was very similar to that just described in Syria. Mr Bryant said that UNDP supported the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre (YEMAC) but it had limited capacity, due to mine action being ‘dormant’ for some years. Due to lack of access to certain areas, UNDP had to use ‘non-traditional’ approaches to address the ERW threat. This involved using open source information and concentrating risk education and clearance efforts on known ‘hot spots’. While the landmine threat was reasonably well known from past work, the threat from UXO and cluster munitions was growing. Activities currently include survey, clearance, risk education and victim assistance. Mr Bryant noted that on the funding side they had received US\$7.5 million of a required US\$10 million for 2016, but he also acknowledged that YEMAC currently did not have the capacity to implement any additional activities.

The representative of Switzerland asked that because of the similarities between Syria and Yemen, was there any exchange between the two programmes, and was there any possibilities for standardizing the innovative approaches that had just been described? Mr Bryant said that as he

was new to Yemen there had not been any direct exchange to date, but that he was now in contact with his UN colleague from Syria.

2.4 Angola. Dr Adriano Goncalves, the Deputy Director of the Angolan National Mine Action coordinating body (CNIDAH) gave an update on the mine action situation in Angola. He noted that Angola has been peaceful since 2002, but that mines and ERW are still causing civilian casualties and hindering reconstruction. Angola is a member of the APMBC and the government has established the necessary coordinating mechanisms. Significant clearance work has been undertaken by the national operator (Executive Commission CE) and international NGOs such as MAG, NPA and HALO Trust, but more work is required for Angola to meet its APMBC Article 5 clearance deadline. The funding situation has become critical because support for the major NGOs has declined steadily over the past few years, with a result that their workforce and capacity has decreased on average by more than 50% since 2008. Dr Conclaves noted that MAG, NPA and HALO Trust had issued a joint appeal to donors to seek funds to 'finish the job'. Mr Goncalves supported this appeal and urged donors to provide timely support to Angola in order for it to meets its clearance obligations.

The representative of the USA stated that the US had long supported the clearance efforts in Angola and would continue to do so. The USA reinforced the point that the job was not yet finished in Angola and they also supported the joint appeal by the three NGOs. The representative of Japan stated that they also continued to support mine action in Angola and urged other donors to do so. Japan hosts a regular meeting called the Tokyo International Conference for African Development (TICAD) and the next meeting is planned for 26 – 27 August 2016 in Nairobi. Mine action will be an agenda item for this year's meeting.

2.5 Colombia. The last country update concerned Colombia. Mr Stan Brown, Director of PM/WRA in the US Department of State, referred to the recent announcement by President Obama that the USA would provide US\$50 million for mine action in Colombia over the next five years. This commitment was in partnership with Norway and 10 other donors and was timed to coincide with the expected peace accords. The support was designed to help Colombia meet its Ottawa Convention commitment to being mine-free by 2021. Mr Brown urged other donors to assist Colombia with funding and technical advice. He said that the USA was planning to arrange an experts meeting in Bogota in May 2016, which would have the aim of addressing technical issues and would provide the Government with an opportunity to present its plans and priorities to an international audience.

The UNMAS Programme Manager for Colombia, Mr Yohn Medina Vivanco then provided some details about the work of UNMAS in Colombia. He noted that 199 municipalities in Colombia are affected by mines and ERW (with reports of accident over the last 5 years) and that Colombia has the second highest number of mine victims in the world (217 new victims in 2015). Colombia has been engaging in a peace process since 2012, and it is expected that the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP will sign a peace accord in 2016. A number of points agreed upon in the negotiations will not be able to be implemented on a wide scale without a humanitarian demining process. The mine action sector, and in particular the humanitarian demining framework used by the Government of Colombia, needs to expand. Colombia is a member of the APMBC and recently gained an extension for its Article 5 clearance obligation until 2021. A National Mine Action Authority has been established and the government has classified the municipalities in accordance to the impact of the contamination. UNMAS plan to help strengthen the National Mine Action

Authority (DAICMA), provide strategic support to improve the mine action framework (e.g. standards, land release, etc.) and to help expand the humanitarian demining sector in Colombia.

2.6 Mine Action in Urban Environments / Conflict Settings. In introducing this topic, the Chair reminded the meeting that it was recently pointed out by the UN Secretary General, in view of the World Humanitarian Summit, that 92% of people killed or injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians: urban areas have become death traps for thousands of civilians. The Director of the GICHD, Ambassador Stefano Toscano was then invited to share with the meeting the current thoughts and work of the GICHD in this regard. Ambassador Toscano said that in urban/conflict environments the traditional challenges to all humanitarian actors remain, like access to contaminated areas, how to guarantee the safety and security of staff and more generally how to uphold the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Also, one would have to expect different types of contamination (often covered by rubble), increased use of IEDs and also poorly managed ammunition depots. Today's conflicts are also characterized by a lack of clear cut interlocutors, such as the growing number, opacity and unpredictability of parties to a conflict.

Ambassador Toscano said that in addressing these challenges we need to be flexible and innovative, yet clear on what is at stake, and that the humanitarian family, including mine action actors, needs to ensure stronger cooperation, for example by means of a 'common analytical lens'. Different types of risks, such as IEDs, require a distinct set of skills, equipment and procedures. Partnering with local organizations will be instrumental in gaining acceptance and taking advantage of local knowledge, while international frameworks can help enhance the feasibility and legitimacy of operations and make them more sustainable. He concluded by saying that mine action operations in urban/conflict areas are increasing and that the sector needs to be flexible, yet lucid, to respond to this new challenge.

3. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

3.1 JMU/CISR update on training. Ms Suzanne Fiederlein from the Centre for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR) at James Madison University provided an update on their current training programme. Ms Fiederlein reminded the meeting that JMU had been conducting the Senior Mine Action Managers training course since 2004. This year they are going to resume holding a global course at JMU in late May or early June. They are also planning to hold a regional course in Croatia later in the year, focussing on participants from Eastern Europe, SE Europe and the Caucuses. Ms Fiederlein thanked the USA for their financial support of the CISR management training courses.

3.2 International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance with Mine Action – 4 April 2016. The Chair reminded the meeting that the 4th of April each year has been designated by the United Nations as the International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance with Mine Action. He invited members to inform the meeting if they had any plans for this day, and if not, he would keep in touch with UNMAS and other partners about possible events in New York or Geneva, and pass on any relevant information as it came to hand.

Ms Marcaillou informed attendees that the theme of April 4th this year would be 'mine action is humanitarian action'. In New York, UNMAS is planning a photo exhibition, film screenings and other events. In Geneva, UNMAS will install the 'digital minefield' in the Palais des Nations (in partnership with a private company, Critical Mass and the GICHD) and they are also planning for UNMAS and GICHD flags to be placed on the Pont du Mont Blanc. UNMAS is also encouraging its field programmes to take part in the week's activities e.g. by arranging sporting events for people with disabilities, etc. UNMAS welcomes the participation of its Member State partners.

3.3 20 years of International Mine Action Standards. The original International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) were developed at a meeting held in Copenhagen in July 1996 (and subsequently issued in March 1997), which means that this year will mark the 20th anniversary of the concept of international standards to regulate mine action. To mark this occasion, Ms Marcaillou said that UNMAS are considering holding a press conference (or similar event) in New York in conjunction with Italy (as Chair of the MASG). More detail will be provided to the MASG as this idea develops.

3.4 Launch of the UN Portfolio of Mine Action Projects. Ms Marcaillou advised that the 2016 version of the UN Portfolio of UN Mine Action Projects would be launched at a press conference later in the day. She reminded the meeting that donors had requested that the Portfolio continue to be produced by the United Nations, and that most of the funding needs of the countries discussed at the MASG today were in the Portfolio. Ms Marcaillou thanked UNDP and UNICEF for their participation in the Portfolio process, and that the Portfolio was available in paper and electronic format.

3.5 Mobile Applications. Mr Paul Heslop, the UNMAS Operations Manager briefed the meeting that a new version of the 'Landmine, ERW and IED Safety Handbook' had just been released. The hardcopy version was in a better format and had been designed with assistance from UN DSS. The handbook is available in French, English, Spanish and Arabic. Mr Heslop noted that while there have been significant advances in the technologies being adopted by the mine action sector, some low tech solutions like posters, handbooks etc. were still relevant and easy to implement in high risk areas.

4. NEXT MEETING OF THE MASG

The Chair reminded the members that the MASG traditionally meets twice per year – once in Geneva to coincide with the annual meeting of National Mine Action Directors, and a longer meeting in New York towards the end of the year. He said for the past two years the New York meeting was held in the second week of October. The Chair proposed that the next meeting of the MASG be tentatively scheduled for early October, but a firm date would be confirmed after consultations with partners and studying the UN New York calendar.

5. UPDATES FROM MASG MEMBERS AND OBSERVERS

The Chair requested that members and observers provide any written updates to the Secretariat and advised that these reports will be posted on the MASG website, along with the minutes, in due course.

MEETING CLOSE

The meeting was closed at 15.00 hours.

Final (as at 17 March 2016)