

MINUTES

MINE ACTION SUPPORT GROUP MEETING

11 APRIL 2013, NEW YORK

1. Introduction.

The Chair of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG) Ms Christine Pahlman opened the meeting at 16.00 hours and welcomed all participants. In particular, the Chair thanked all the Geneva based donors for their participation, along with the regular observer organizations. A copy of the attendance list is attached. The Chair confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting of the MASG held in New York on 5 September 2012. The agenda for the meeting was agreed, and the Chair noted that the focus of the meeting was to be on discussion of the two studies that the MASG had undertaken – one on 'Mine Action Coordination and Partnerships' and the other on a 'Business case for Mine Action Completion'.

2. Discussion on MASG study into Mine Action Coordination and Partnerships, and the way ahead.

The Chair introduced this session by noting that it had been agreed at the March 2012 meeting of the MASG that the MASG Secretariat explore how the MASG may contribute to enhancing donor coordination and partnerships in mine action. Following the March meeting, Terms of Reference were agreed and a study was undertaken by the MASG Secretariat (Mr Ian Mansfield). The Chair outlined that the study on 'Mine Action Coordination and Partnerships' mapped donor interests and support to mine action, and considered ways that the MASG may be able to improve coordination and partnerships in the area of mine action. It also identified ways that the MASG could be more proactive in coordinating the work of its members through joint assessments, information exchange, joint monitoring and evaluations etc.

The study had been drafted before the New York meeting in September 2012 but unfortunately there was no time to discuss it at that meeting. The Secretariat provided an overview of the main findings of the study. A copy of the presentation is attached. Following the presentation the Chair invited comment from members.

Canada said that they saw the primary purposes of the MASG were to facilitate information exchange and to allow the UN and other mine action organizations to raise their needs for donor support in a smaller forum. They did not see the MASG as a formal body to coordinate donor activities. Finland agreed with the proposal to broaden the membership of the MASG to include new donors. The Netherlands agreed that the MASG was currently effective at 'lower level' information sharing but they would like to see more, such as providing a forum for more detailed discussion on the UN Strategy and the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) etc. Donors could then use this information to influence their decision making – which was effectively coordination. The UK agreed with the general themes of the paper, and agreed that the MASG should consider issues like the UN Strategy and VTF in future sessions. They also advised that they were currently in the process of reviewing their mine action work which would lead to the elaboration of a new strategy. The UK sought clarification on the recommendation about a 'lead donor' in-country. The USA said that they were comfortable with the recommendations, particularly with regard to greater information exchange, which would lead to greater transparency, enable prioritisation and avoid waste and duplication. The USA also questioned the recommendation on 'lead donors', but said it could be comfortable with the suggestion to recognise a 'de-facto' lead donor in certain situations. The USA also did not see benefit in harmonizing the reporting requirements of grantees. France stated that as seen within the UN, coordination at the global level was always difficult, but they believed coordination at the local level was more efficient.

In response the Chair noted that one of the stated aims of the MASG includes ‘to coordinate the humanitarian mine action programs of the world’s major donor states, harmonise the prioritisation of their respective mine action programs, and increase donor support for mine action where it is most needed’. Mr Mansfield responded that the recommendation on ‘lead donors’ was only intended for countries where it made sense for a lead (usually large) donor to support the national authority in its coordination role and in providing a driving force for mine action i.e. Norway in Mozambique.

Ms Marcaillou of UNMAS said that enhanced effectiveness from donor contributions, rather than coordination was a key factor. She noted that it would be useful if the ‘MASG platform’ could exist at the affected country level as well at the New York and Geneva level. She also felt that by setting out the minimal reporting elements common to all donors, the MASG could help mine action authorities in working towards the different reporting requirements of donors. She also suggested that when evaluating the resources committed by donors to mine action, it should also include in-kind contributions. Mr Mattson of UNOPS spoke of the importance of harmonisation of reporting and the work being done to develop standards on reporting norms, through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). Ms Grayson of UNICEF emphasised that country level coordination should be led by the host governments and that if national authorities were not already coordinating assistance they should be encouraged to do so. She also requested that the MASG look at publishing the various annual budget cycles, surge funding points and financial years of donor countries to assist implementing agencies in preparing proposals, projects and funding requests. Mr Horner of UNDP noted the variety of in-country coordination systems and gave some examples of effective donor coordination at the country level e.g. Bosnia and Laos. He noted that it was difficult for UNDP to report on the global mine action contributions as most of UNDP’s funding goes through the country office level.

The USA raised the question of the level of implementation of the study recommendations. Some could be achieved with no changes to the Secretariat’s current size and shape, but the USA cautioned that some of the work would be dependent on the continued funding of the Secretariat post-2013, which was not guaranteed.

In conclusion, the Chair thanked the members for their comments and said that they would be taken into account in refining its recommendations and in considering the way forward for the study. Based on the comments and discussion the Secretariat will undertake further work on how the MASG could contribute to improved coordination and partnerships for the ongoing consideration of MASG members. The Chair recommended that this topic become a regular agenda item of MASG meetings. The Chair noted that the MASG would also continue its efforts to enhance information exchange through the website, email and other sources.

3. Update on MASG study into a ‘Business case for Completion’ and the way ahead.

The Chair reminded the meeting that the aim of this study was to consider how the MASG may contribute to the “Completion Initiative”, which had been established by the United Nations to assist affected countries complete their clearance work and meet their APMBC and CCM clearance obligations. This study had been discussed to some degree at the MASG September 2012 meeting in New York and four mine affected countries had been invited to present their perspectives on completion. At the 2012 meeting, UNDP noted that a key aspect was that the different types of completion and their considerations had been identified. It was agreed that the UN Completion Initiative document needed to be revised and the number of countries to be considered for completion support be reviewed along with the criteria.

The Secretariat gave an overview of the study, which is attached. Mr Horner of UNDP said that the MASG study had helped clarify the terminology and definitions of completion, and that he appreciated the work of the MASG secretariat in re-drafting the text of the Initiative. He noted that his office had continued building a database of affected countries with the aim of having a colour coded system showing where countries were with regard to completion of their clearance obligations.

Australia said that they were interested in the completion concept, particularly as the impact of countries declaring completion was a strong indicator of the success of mine action which in turn helped to maintain the profile of mine action and attract funding support. The USA stated that their focus was to prioritise funding for the clearance of high risk areas within affected countries, according to humanitarian need, and that they were not interested in funding the clearance of the 'last mine' in order to 'check a box' for a treaty obligation. The USA also said that if its funding assisted countries to meet an obligation that was fine, but that was not its primary concern. The USA did not believe that stockpile destruction should be part of the completion initiative. Switzerland and the UK both agreed that funding should be focussed on the greatest need and impact, but also supported attention being made to countries meeting their Treaty obligations. Switzerland noted that in the field deminers cleared all types of munitions and they would not adapt their strategy to only focus on one or another treaty. Finland stated that they were still considering the implications of the completion initiative. France agreed with the US analysis, but also noted the concern with the increasing number of extension requests within the APMBC.

Mr Rutherford of the CISR reminded members that Article 6 of the APMBC required States Parties in a position to do so to provide assistance to mine affected countries in order that they may meet their Treaty obligations. Mr Paterson of the GICHD said that the study should not neglect the 'business case' aspect, as there was a strong business case for completion. He said that economies of scale and different funding arrangements (e.g. payment for results) could help countries achieve completion sooner and thus save money and resources. New Zealand acknowledged the need to focus on areas with the greatest humanitarian risk, but also noted that it was worthwhile bearing in mind that a strong economic case could help with completion and would be good for the 'health' of the treaties. The ITF also supported the business case concept encouraging humanitarian activity rather than who is and who is not a signatory of the Ottawa or Oslo convention, and gave some examples in their region where the provision of modest levels of funding would allow countries to achieve completion faster.

The Chair thanked members and observers for their views and noted that funding for humanitarian priorities and achieving treaty obligations did not need to be considered mutually exclusive. She noted the view that stockpile destruction should not be included in the initiative. The Chair proposed that the way ahead would be to support the UNDP to continue its work on developing a database of countries nearing completion, with the aim of identifying two or three countries of focus each year. It was then proposed that these countries could be invited to future MASG meetings to present their case for completion. It was proposed that completion become a regular item on the MASG meeting agenda. The MASG Secretariat will continue to refine the study and its recommendations in consultation with the UN including further exploration of the business case aspects of completion.

4. MASG Secretariat Workplan and Budget 2013.

The Chair explained that when the MASG Secretariat was established last year, a workplan for 2012 was developed based on the Implementation Plan developed by the Australian Chair. The Secretariat had now developed a new workplan and budget for 2013 and this had been distributed to MASG members prior to this meeting. Mr Mansfield outlined the key points in the workplan, which included ongoing secretariat support to the MASG, representing the MASG on the Review Board of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and undertaking studies and research as required. The budget included provision for travel to the two MASG meetings in Geneva and New York.

There were no questions about the Secretariat workplan and budget. The Chair requested members to think about fresh ideas for the Secretariat to study or review in the future. With regard to funding for the remainder of 2013, the UK confirmed that the existing UK funds would be extended to cover the Secretariat costs until the end of November 2013.

5. Updates from MASG members.

Due to the short time available for the meeting, MASG members had been asked to provide their updates in writing. These will be posted on the MASG website along with the minutes of the meeting. The Chair also encouraged MASG members to contribute statements to the session on Resource Mobilization at the 16th Annual Meeting of National Mine Action Directors meeting.

6. Updates from the United Nations IACG-MA.

The United Nations agencies were asked to provide written updates which will be posted on the MASG website. However, the Chair asked if the UN if they wished to update the meeting on the two recent mine action appeals for Syria and Mali.

The Director UNMAS, Ms Marcaillou said that an appeal for US\$10 million for mine action in Syria had been launched but to date little support had been received. She advised that the UNMAS staff presence in Damascus would not be maintained because of visa issues, and due to lack of funds UNMAS would only be able to maintain one national staff member for the region in Amman. Ms Marcaillou was planning to visit Amman next week to assess the situation.

With regard to Mali, the UNICEF representative, Ms Judy Grayson said that a mine action adviser had deployed to Mali since April 2012 to cover MRE, surveillance and victim assistance. She noted that there had been a lot of population movement in and around Mali, and that there had been a high number of civilian UXO accidents. For Syria, UNICEF was part of the UN response but work was constrained by lack of funds and poor security.

Mr Tim Horner from UNDP stated that UNDP was providing mine action assistance to 24 countries. He noted that they had recently finished providing support to Ethiopia, were about to do the same in Sri Lanka and should wind up in Mozambique next year. With regards to other countries, UNDP mine action was just re-engaging with Libya and Yemen, had provided some initial support to Myanmar and was about to start in Vietnam. UNDP will also support Zambia for the next CCM MSP.

Ms Marcaillou continued by saying that UNMAS had deployed five staff to Bamako, Mali as part of their humanitarian response, which included IED risk education. She said that any future mandate would depend on the political and military situation. She thanked Japan for their support in Mali. With regards to other work, UNMAS is currently managing 18 programs. UNMAS had seconded a technical adviser to UNDP for Yemen and they will start some weapons management and ammunition stockpile work in Liberia in July.

Ms Marcaillou then made two specific requests for funding. The first was for US\$200,000 to update the UN policy on victim assistance. This would cover consultants, workshops, surveys and production of the report. The work is scheduled to start in June and should only take a few months. The second appeal was to establish a monitoring and evaluation component for the new UN mine action strategy, which would include the setting up of a reporting system and software to support it. This would be a three-year project, with US\$450,000 required for the first year, and a total of US\$850,000 for the three year period.

7. Updates from observer organizations.

Again, the observer organizations – GICHD, MAIC, ITF and OAS –were asked to provide written updates. These will be posted on the website when received.

8. Next Chair of the MASG.

The Chair reminded the meeting that Australia's tenure as Chair of the MASG was for the two year period 2012 – 2013, so it was time to start thinking about the next Chair for the period 2014 – 2015. MASG members who have not yet been Chair were encouraged to consider doing so. The Chair noted that now there was

Secretariat support it may be easier for some smaller countries to take on the role. The Chair said that she would like to have a nomination in place by the time of the next annual meeting in New York scheduled for October 2013.

9. Date for next annual MASG meeting in New York.

The Chair proposed that the next annual meeting of the MASG be held on Friday, 18 October in the Australian Mission to the UN in New York.

10. Any Other Business.

There were no points of other business.

11. Meeting Close.

The Chair closed the meeting at 18.00 hours.

End

2 May 2103