

United Nations  Nations Unies

Opening Remarks by

Agnès Marcaillou, Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service

**19th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors
and UN Advisers**

Tuesday 16 February 2016

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I mentioned last year, this annual meeting considered the theme: “more than mines”. It triggered an enlightening interactive debate on the evolution of the nature of conflict, as Stefano just said. We also considered the weaponry used and the necessary adaptation of humanitarian mine action to the emerging needs of affected countries and populations. This year’s theme, selected with the consent of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, will keep our collective focus on humanitarian needs, humanitarian emergencies, and humanitarian responses.

Current conflicts have indeed strengthened the criticality of mine action as an enabler to timely and effective humanitarian interventions. Our reflections, our outputs, will this week translate into deeds. The unanimous messages that Member States have included in the most recent General Assembly resolutions negotiated within different committees of the general assembly; and I can quote here the Assistance in Mine Action Protection of and Assistance to IDPs, Countering the threats of IEDs, etc...

Our experiences, good practices, as well as challenges, will also constitute a valuable input into the negotiations of the upcoming WHS scheduled for next May in Istanbul. I would like to call on the assistance of all Member States, affected and contributors alike, as well as members of the civil society, to transcend traditional silo approaches, and convey strong messages to those who, as we speak, are finalising their positions, their contributions to the outcome documents of the summit. It is indeed crucial for you to remember that the final outcomes of the summit must acknowledge this past year’s needs and increases in request for mine action assistance in the context of humanitarian emergencies. Mine action, understood at country level, is a critical enabler for effective humanitarian response, PoC, for the safe movement of populations, humanitarian and other aid personnel. This must be valued and prioritised in the discussions of the WHS, next May, in Istanbul.

During its 70th session the General Assembly adopted a unanimous position on mine action and conveyed clear guidance to the mine action community. In its resolution entitled: “Assistance in Mine Action”, the GA as a whole, underlined in particular that mine action is important and an integrated component of humanitarian assistance. Member States also highlighted, for the first time, the impact of mines and ERWs on IDPs and refugees. Similarly, also for the first time, the resolution on protection of and assistance to IDPs referred to mines, ERW and IEDs as a threat to IEDs and an impediment to their voluntary return, local reintegration and resettlement. The problems posed by IEDs also received renewed attention. A resolution dedicated to this issue was introduced by Afghanistan underlining the need for the International Community to enhance its efforts against the threats

and, I quote, “provide appropriate assistance to victims of such attacks”. I am grateful to Member States for recognising the role of UNMAS, as Mr. Titov just said, and its mitigation of the threat posed by IEDs, to civilians, peace keepers, and humanitarian personnel. In another first, the GA resolution on Assistance in Mine Action also acknowledged the humanitarian threat posed by IEDs following conflict. It underlined the need for affected states to be provided with support by other states and the UN to locate, remove, destroy and otherwise render ineffective these weapons.

Lastly and more importantly, all of us present here this week in various capacities are affected every day by the humanitarian devastation caused by mines, cluster munitions, barrel bombs, ERWs and IEDs. Yesterday, the SG of the UN referred to 2015 as one of the most turbulent years in recent history: “The blatant disrespect for fundamental principals of international human rights and humanitarian law defies our common humanity”, said the SG yesterday. Equally appalled by what happened yesterday, the executive director of UNICEF, Mr. Lake, like most of us here, expressed his disgust at yesterday’s targeting and destruction of hospitals, and I quote: “ apart from compelling considerations of diplomacy and obligations under international humanitarian law, let us remember that yesterday’s victims were children. We are all here talking about obligations under humanitarian law, treaties. Remember that our duty is to work here, to care for them. These are not words on a piece of paper, these are lives lost. These are deliberate targeting in conflicts that have taken a turn that we cannot tolerate”.

Mr. Titov referred to the example of Syria. Iraq is another example where the mine action service served as an indispensable first responder. The same applies to Yemen. Sadly, too many countries are following suit. In Gaza, every deep-buried bomb we destroy in liaison with national authorities and in partnership with the Government of Israel, are testimony to the fact that mine action is, and will continue to be, a source of dialogue and confidence building when all parties agree that lives do matter.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, this meeting embodies the fact that partnership, and most often, selflessness, are the DNA of the mine action community. Achievements are only possible thanks to the effective collaboration between the UN, member states, and civil society. Thanks to increased use of synergies and to our collective respect and compliance with the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Before concluding, I would like to thank the national directors and UN advisors for coming from so far to share their experience, lessons learnt and best practices, and for supporting each other, including along south/south lines. This meeting has been designed to give them space to do so, including as you noticed, increasingly from the podium, where they will chair and participate in the sessions you will attend. We do look forward to listening to them. I am also particularly pleased with the number of attendees and with the high level representation we have recorded this year. It is a record I am told. The Director General of UNOG must be praised for a big chunk of that success in opening to us the ‘Palais des Nations’ and in making available interpretation. So please make good use of these interpretation services, which will help our debate be even richer.

I would like also to pay special tribute to OCHA and to the UNHCR, which contributed significantly to the preparation of this week's event, as well as to the presence of remarkable women, such as Ms. Kyung Wha Khan, who will join us on the podium shortly. She is the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs. The presence amongst us of Ms. Kelly Clements, the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, and the presence among us of Lise Grande, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq, are evidence of the significant role played by their respective UN organisations in mine action.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge here the contributions of UNDP and UNICEF to the preparation of this meeting. Likewise, my UN colleagues, at UNMAS New York and Geneva, deserve praise for dedicating many long hours to making this meeting an interesting one, and hopefully a well organised one. I hope you will appreciate their efforts throughout the week.

Last but definitely not least, merci beaucoup to the Centre International de Deminage Humanitaire de Genève, for being always such a valuable partner. Time has come now to making this short week a fruitful one, to dive into the substance. We owe it to those who depend on us for their survival and their wellbeing, and nobody is better placed than Ms. Kyung Wha Khan, who will join me on the podium now, as our keynote speaker.

Thank you very much Ms Kang for accepting to be our keynote speaker. The floor is yours.