

United Nations  Nations Unies

Opening Remarks by

Assistant Secretary-General Dmitry Titov

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

Tuesday 16 February 2016

Distinguished delegates,

Friends and colleagues,

I would first like to thank the United Nations Office at Geneva, and in particular Director-General Mr. Møller, for opening the *Palais des Nations* to the mine action community. The high level of guests this year is a manifestation of the high level of support the mine action area enjoys globally.

I do promise that – despite the mighty potential of the participants – they will not *undermine* the core values of the Palais. We will have a productive meeting.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this unique meeting which brings together practitioners from the field, national authorities, humanitarian partners, donors and many others. Indeed, the world of mine action is unique – as it cuts across so many vital areas.

Let's face it: mine action is not only about mines. We fully established that. It is a vast universe with its own complexity. Mine action is about clearing fields, forests and farms. It is about educating populations and reducing risks, about allowing peacekeepers and humanitarians to do their jobs and creating livelihoods for local communities. It is about evacuating, treating and supporting the victims.

And definitely, mine action is about the protection of civilians. Your work – removing explosive threats, managing stockpiles, but also supporting programmes to disarm former combatants and strengthening security sector management – is critical for the establishment of a protective environment.

It lays the ground for economic recovery and the return of the displaced. In doing so, it also creates space for political processes, laying the ground for sustainable peace.

In essence, you are enablers, protectors and care givers.

At the same time, mine action has a special capacity to work with almost everyone – the population on the ground, the military and police, civil society and national authorities, NGOs and other humanitarian and human rights actors, academia, the private sector – it is the uniqueness of this business that makes it so great. You are making a difference in places where few others will go. Furthermore, you have at your disposal many exceptional tools – and here I am not only talking about technology where you mastery is unparalleled.

Standing here in front of you, I am therefore humbled and proud to be associated with UNMAS and the wider mine action community. Through UNMAS, I personally learned a lot

over the past 8 years, and together, we have managed to propel this world Service to new global heights.

I am very proud that despite many – natural – hesitations, which some of you had, you have heeded my advice to do exactly what was your destiny – do more than mines. By turning ourselves to protecting the UN flag and the people we serve from the scourge of IEDs, as well as through weapons management, UNMAS has set a new stage in its development, one that is vital for the whole United Nations system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is an exceptional meeting, because it is taking place at an exceptional moment in time. As the UN Secretary-General said, and I quote: “These are challenging times. We live in an era of transition and dramatic change.” *End of quote.*

United Nations civilian staff, peacekeepers and humanitarian workers – and the world at large – are operating in an increasingly dangerous era, marked by violent extremism, terrorism, transnational organized crime and the use of deadly explosive devices. I take this opportunity to pay tribute many of you that are making personal sacrifices every day in the field.

Following the recommendations of the UN High Level panel on peace operations, the Secretary-General, in his implementation report, laid out an action plan, mobilizing the UN to address the very complicated current international environment. And UNMAS – and many of you – are already engaged to implement key elements of this report.

Our colleagues are working diligently to: develop explosive hazard threat mitigation measures; enhance rapid deployment capacities; and strengthen partnerships with key regional organizations across the board, but first and foremost with the African Union. UNMAS is playing a central role within the UN system, through integration in the field, and also chairing the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action at Headquarters.

As always, we in DPKO are open to interaction with all major regional players, and I urge UNMAS to further explore opportunities to strengthen your already impressive collaboration with many of you present today. By doing so, you will directly implement the “all-UN approach” practiced by DPKO and my Office, the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions. And I am very glad that UNMAS has established itself as an integral part of the Office.

But most importantly, every day, the dramatic impact of explosive hazards – in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Somalia and Syria – demonstrates that mine action must remain at the top of the international agenda.

This was one of the core messages made by the Secretary-General in his 2015 report on Assistance in Mine Action. It heralded a great achievement – the decrease in the number of victims of anti-personnel landmines. Yet, in the same report, the Head of the UN was obliged to stress, and I quote: – that “there has been **no** decline in the number of casualties related to explosive remnants of war, and the percentage of civilian victims who are children continues to rise”. *End of quote.*

Furthermore, the range of explosive hazards threatening civilians, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers continues, unfortunately, to expand. We have seen the irreparable damage caused by improvised explosive devices, by cluster munitions, and by warfare in or against major population centers.

Last December, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the biennial resolution on Assistance in Mine Action. I take this opportunity to thank colleagues from the European Union, and in particular Poland, for facilitating an inclusive and transparent consultation process which resulted in the adoption of a very strong document.

I am particularly pleased that the GA resolution recognized the significant role of the UN in this area – and the coordinating role UNMAS plays in implementing the system-wide Strategy on Mine Action. The development of the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism, a core element of the Strategy, will enhance transparency and accountability. This, in turn, will strengthen your relationships with both the recipients and donors.

At the same time, the update of the UN Victim Assistance Policy will help the Organization to ensure greater effectiveness of its work in support of victims of mines.

In my capacity as the head of OROLSI, I am proud of the way UNMAS performs **both** as the coordinator for mine action in the United Nations system – **and** as the lead for the mine action area of the Global Protection Cluster – not to mention the outstanding performance in the field. It allows the Service to act as a bridge between peace and security aspects and humanitarian and developmental endeavours.

Through your delivery in the most difficult and dangerous parts of the world, through your vision and leadership, the whole mine action family has demonstrated a distinct value for the international community.

For example, in 2015, at the request of the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator – as well as international NGOs – UNMAS established a small team in Gaziantep to support urgent humanitarian activities from this strategic location. Even in the current extremely challenging environment, a small mine action team is already achieving important life-saving results. Since August 2015, almost 7 tons of Explosive Remnants of War have been destroyed by them.

This work in Syria serves as a testimony to what the mine action community can achieve when it is working together.

And looking beyond, we are exploring even more deadly zones of Syria, Libya and Yemen – and I know that you have already started planning for that. UNMAS is participating in this.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting also serves as a unique opportunity to express our deep gratitude to donors for their generous contributions to the crucial work of mine action. But, I am obliged to say – with regret – that unfortunately, we need more – more of your political support, your newest technology, your training, your logistics on the ground – as well as substantial programmatic assistance in funding.

At the same time, I have to stress that all mine action actors must demonstrate utmost effectiveness and efficiency, and spend every penny wisely, especially in this era of an ever increasing number of conflict zones.

Finally, I would like to thank all who are hosting and participating in this meeting. This includes the members of the IACG, as well as our traditional and very valued partner, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. I trust that they will enjoy this meeting, even though this year it is taking place at the Palais. But I do promise that all of us will be back at the headquarters of the Center to enjoy your wisdom and hospitable time and again.

I thank you for your attention.