

United Nations



Nations Unies

Opening Remarks by

Mr. Michael Møller

United Nations Under-Secretary-General

**Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and Personal
Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Conference**

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

Tuesday 16 February 2016

Dear colleagues,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my great pleasure to be with you today for the opening of the 19th International Meeting of Mine Action National Programme Directors and UN Advisors. Let me at the outset particularly thank our colleagues at UNMAS (the United Nations Mine Action Service), the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining for organizing this event which is the biggest annual gathering in the mine action community and which has become a highlight in the International Geneva calendar.

This meeting is an important opportunity to assess the progress and challenges within the sector. It provides an excellent occasion for officials from mine action programmes, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, humanitarian institutions, research organizations and experts, from donor and recipient governments and other mine action implementing partners to come together and form new partnerships. The meeting also builds an important bridge between headquarters and the field. We look forward to listening to you, the colleagues who have come from the implementing countries, to help us ask the right questions and identify ways forward to make real further progress on the ground. I am very pleased that, for the first time, this meeting also involves student-volunteers from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies and the University of Geneva.

As you were all coming here this morning, you may have passed by the broken chair on Place des Nations which is one of the symbols of international Geneva. Its broken leg is a vivid reminder of the impact of land mines on people's lives.

There is international agreement and consensus on banning mines. But the landmines and unexploded devices in the ground remain there despite such agreements and they are a threat for decades to come, killing or maiming thousands of individuals every year, mostly women, children and older people. Much work still needs to be done to ensure that those mines and other unexploded ordonances can do no harm. The challenge now is to keep up the momentum, to raise the resources needed to advance demining, provide mine risk education programmes and ensure support to victims.

International Geneva is a prominent host of organisations engaged in the practical implementation of mine action activities. It is also the city where most of the meetings and conferences of the States Parties to the mine action treaties are held. Every year, the United Nations in Geneva hosts meetings of States Parties' to Treaties such as the Ottawa Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The work under these Conventions has a concrete impact on the ground. If, for example, Mozambique could be declared mine-free it is thanks to activities under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban

Convention, coordinated from Geneva. Geneva-based actors have contributed to the negotiation of mine action standards on mine risk education, demining, victim assistance, advocacy and stockpile destruction. These standards also facilitate coordination with the humanitarian and developmental programmes, as well as with peacekeeping and peace support operations. Indeed, mine action is a vivid example of how work done by actors based here has a concrete impact on people's lives around the world.

But there is a broader dimension: Sustainable development cannot be achieved unless the problem of landmines and explosive ordonances is resolved. Explosive remnants of war prevent farmers from cultivating their land and deprive people of their livelihoods. They prevent hospitals from being rebuilt and children from reaching their schools safely. They hinder the delivery of humanitarian relief and the safe deployment of peacekeeping operations. By blocking the peaceful development after the end of conflict, landmines and unexploded ordonances become serious obstacles to reconstruction. Investing in mine action therefore means investing in development, investing in the future. Demining seen in its broader dimension becomes an issue of peace, rights and wellbeing of the people living in areas of current or past conflict.

Ladies and gentlemen, demining is a key priority for the United Nations. Thanks to the tireless efforts of all of you present here today, hundreds of thousands of mines and other explosive remnants of war have been and will be cleared safely every year. Through your work and engagement, essential assistance is provided to mine victims, mine stockpiles are destroyed, mine-risk education programmes are run and advocacy campaigns calling for a world without landmines are heard. You and we can be proud of your work. I thank you for these efforts and I wish you success in your deliberations. I hope that thanks to your determination, the broken chair at our doorstep may one day be just seen as a reminder of some distant historic past.

I thank you.