

Update on GICHD Activities 2014

MASG, 10 October 2014

1. Knowledge

Management of Residual Explosives (MORE):

- Let me first speak about a research project that was presented in detail by my colleague Guy Rhodes, Director of Operations at GICHD, at the last MASG meeting in New York.
- The project “Management of Residual Explosives”, or MORE, looks at applying risk management methods to threats posed by residual contamination.
- The disposal of ERW is assessed by some countries as a long-term challenge requiring comprehensive clearance activities and significant funds – numbers such as 300 years/USD 10 bn come to mind.
- Applying appropriate risk management methods allows in our opinion to reframe the issue from what could appear at first a daunting task to a less intimidating undertaking
- The project involves 15 countries in Europe and Asia which manage long-term contamination from the two World Wars and more recent wars in South-East Asia.

The aim is to exchange experiences as well as distil lessons learned and good practices out of decade-long efforts in dealing with residual contamination.

We also look into the ageing of ordnance and how it impacts risk management.

- Preliminary findings and recommendations include:
 - Dealing with ERW is not an impossible task: Key here is to move towards an approach based on the management of risks when and where they occur. Please note that not all ERW pose a direct hazard. For example, UK practice generally leaves bombs more than 5 meters below the surface undisturbed.
 - In other words: This project promotes a pro-active survey and clearance of high-risk contamination such as landmines and sub-munitions, while allowing for a longer-term management of ERW that are less hazardous and whose location is less well defined, such as deep-buried bombs.
 - Lessons from Europe tell us that managing residual contamination requires adjustments at the policy and institutional levels – from a pro-active to a re-active approach, and from dedicated institutions to a more sustainable institutional architecture.
- Next steps: Presentation of the findings at CCW in Geneva in November. In May 2015, a MORE landmark seminar is scheduled in Southeast Asia, including the launch of an electronic publication.

Animal Detection Information System for Technical Survey:

- The GICHD, together with Digger (Swiss demining machine producer) and Norwegian People's Aid, is conducting a project to develop more efficient methods of using dogs in technical survey.
- The project explores a new approach to surveying with free running dogs compared to the traditional approach using dogs on a leash for clearance operations. This method allows to cover larger areas (between 10'000 and 40'000 sqm per day) without prior ground preparation, with the ultimate goal to identify explosive hazards and determine what areas require further follow up by machines or manual deminers.
- The information system – developed to be carried by a dog – consists of a GPS, camera and radio which allows the dog handler to see his dog's location on a smartphone and to give it oral commands from a far distance.
- This new technique will be presented next December in Cambodia.

2. Norms & Standards

International Mine Action Standard (IMAS) on underwater explosives:

- Explosive remnants of war (ERW) not only pollute land but also the waters of several states. Disposing or abandoning of explosive ordnance during various 'old' and 'new' conflicts has resulted in millions of tonnes of explosive ordnance in global waters worldwide.
- Underwater explosives are a direct hazard to coastal communities, the fishing industry and divers and impede development efforts such as construction projects and mineral exploration. Apart from immediate safety concerns are environmental impacts due to leakage of chemicals.
- Recognizing the need to address this challenge, the GICHD, in cooperation with a group of experts, is in the process of drafting an IMAS on Underwater Survey and Clearance of ERW. The draft was reviewed and fully supported by an Expert Focus Group in Geneva on 25 September. Following the inclusion of minor revisions recommended by the experts, the draft will be presented to the IMAS Review Board for final approval in the coming weeks.
- Long-term impact of underwater ordnance to the ecosystem and marine resources is not completely understood. Research projects are underway at the GICHD and elsewhere, e.g. a study on the safety, health and environmental hazards associated with a sunken WW II cargo vessel in the commercial harbour in Palau (Pacific), which is leaking toxic explosive chemicals (project started in 2013).

3. Capacity Development

Ammunition Safety Management:

- Ammunition safety is a growing concern worldwide. Rate of explosions has risen dramatically (incidents per year: 1980s: 4; 1990s: 11; 2010s: 24; 2010s: 27).
- In recent years, casualties from unplanned explosions of ammunition storage is roughly comparable to those from anti-personnel mines and other ERW.
- Mishandled ammunition is a concern for safety and security: human casualties and threat to global security when ammunition is diverted to recipients for whom it is not intended.
- Problem is particularly relevant today as remaining ammunition from Cold War exceeds its shelf life; without proper storage and management, it can pose significant risk to people, property and environment.
- The GICHD is increasingly focusing its efforts and resources on ammunition safety management. In particular, we are strengthening our cooperation with other actors in our new premises, the *Maison de la Paix*, such as the Small Arms Survey.

Linguistic Outreach Program:

- The linguistic outreach program is a cornerstone of the GICHD's programs.
- It exists in Arabic, French, Persian and Russian and is conducted in partnership with the affected states' national authorities and regional organisations.
- Objective of the program: on the one hand, to allow for mine action knowledge to be disseminated and discussed in local languages – with a view to enhancing ownership and impact; on the other hand, to promote regional cooperation – taking the shared language as the driver thereof.
- Two examples:
 1. Arabic Outreach Program (AOP):
 - Since the beginning of the AOP in 2012, its outputs include:
 - four technical workshops (in Lebanon, Jordan and Geneva);
 - two annual conferences with national directors and other stakeholders (in Dubai and Kuwait);
 - translation of 17 IMAS (and more to come);
 - creation of an Arabic website and social media.
 - The Government of Algeria and the GICHD will conduct the third AOP annual conference on 'Management of Residual Contamination' in Algeria (21 to 23 October 2014), with the participation of the national authorities from Arabic speaking countries and representatives of regional and international organisations.
 - The gradual hand-over of the AOP to Lebanon will start in 2015.
 2. Persian Outreach Program (POP):
 - A Farsi Outreach Program was initiated with the first annual conference of national directors and other stakeholders in 2013 in Tajikistan.
 - Second annual conference: May 2014, Teheran, Iran (topic: 'Operational Efficiency').
 - Third annual conference: planned for 2015 in Afghanistan.