

MASG MEETING

FRIDAY, 24 JUNE 2022

ROOM B, WIPO - GENEVA

1. OPENING REMARKS

1.1 Chair. The Chair of the MASG, Ambassador Yves Marek of France, opened meeting at 11.40 hours (CEST) and welcomed the 50 in-person participants to the meeting, along with the 15 people joining on-line. Ambassador Marek said that it was good to be meeting in-person (in the margins of the NDM-UN) after a gap of almost two years due to COVID. Ambassador Marek outlined the agenda for the meeting and then welcomed ASG Alexandre Zouev from the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, and Ambassador Gerard Chesnel, the President of the French national mine action agency, CNEMA. Finally, Ambassador Marek congratulated Ms Ilene Cohn on her appointment as Director UNMAS.

Ambassador Marek outlined some of the work undertaken by France in its role as Chair of the MASG. This included an initiative on identifying obstacles to donors in delivering their assistance and ways to work with beneficiary countries to overcome them. France had also commissioned the GICHD to undertake a study on the cost of demining, and this research was underway. The preliminary results will be briefed at the next MASG meeting.

1.2 ASG Zouev, UN DPO. The Chair introduced the keynote speaker, ASG Alexandre Zouev, from the UN Department of Peace Operations. Mr Zouev thanked the Chair for the invitation to address the MASG and said that he was grateful for the ongoing French support. He also thanked the Chair for noting the appointment of Ms Cohn as the Director of UNMAS, and re-affirmed that she has his full support. Mr Zouev mentioned that it was a significant week, being the 25th annual NDM-UN meeting and that it was being held in-person again. He thanked donors for their ongoing political support in the UN Security Council and for their financial support to the UN VTF. In relation to United Nations mine action activities, Mr Zouev acknowledged the commitment and dedication demonstrated by staff over the last year to continue to deliver through ongoing global uncertainty, working towards the vision of a world free of explosive threats.

Mr Zouev then highlighted some of the achievements in 2021 that contributed to achieving the goals of the United Nations Mine Action Strategy 2019 – 2023. These included that in 2021 mine action was represented in 15 UN-supported national development frameworks, 18 humanitarian response plans, as well as in the mandates of nine peacekeeping and three special political missions. The United Nations programmes were responsible for clearing land, roads, and infrastructure points, delivering EORE and VA activities, and assisting with the development of national strategies, including an emphasis on gender activities.

Mr Zouev then proposed the idea of a 'mine action group of friends', like those which support other components in his office - DDR, SSR, Police, and Justice and Corrections. Such a group would promote mine action at the United Nations through advocacy, including in the Fifth Committee, the C-34 and others. Mr Zouev hoped that other key players in mine action, such as Police and Troop

Contributing Countries, as well as affected states, would also join such a group. He believed this would have a positive impact on progressing important mine action issues.

Mr Zouev concluded by reminding members that although progress is being made, there is still a long way to go with regards to mine action. With emerging new conflicts as well as ongoing conflicts globally, the threats continue to grow daily. Therefore, we cannot lose focus and must increase our engagement and commitment to mine action, something that is so fundamental to humanitarian assistance, everlasting peace and security and sustainable development.

The full statement by ASG Zouev can be found on the MASG website.

2. BRIEFINGS: REGIONAL MINE ACTION

2.1 Ukraine.

2.1.1 NMAA Secretariat – Colonel Ruslan Beregulia, Head of Department of Safety, Environment and Mine Action, Ukraine. Colonel Beregulia said that following the Russian invasion, 160,000 sq km of Ukraine must be surveyed because of EOD contamination, for the identification of hazard areas. Many towns have been attacked, including with cluster munitions. After areas have been liberated, they have been found to contain IEDs and other ERW. Almost 5 million people live near hazardous areas. The loss of agricultural land will cost billions of dollars in lost revenue. Since February, EOD hot spot tasks have been undertaken in over 377 liberated settlements with 1.5 million items of ERW destroyed. The steps the Ukrainian authorities have taken to neutralize the threat of ERW include amendments to the mine action law, amendments to national standards, and the approval of an operational plan for mine action. Four mine action operators are certified to work in Ukraine, they are HALO, FSD, DRC and Demining Solutions, and others have applied to work in the country. In conclusion, Colonel Beregulia thanked all governments and NGOs who are assisting Ukraine.

2.1.2 UNDP Ukraine – Mr Oleksandr Sushchenko, UNDP Team Leader – Energy and Environment. Mr Sushchenko said that UNDP had been assisting Ukraine with mine action since 2016, and that they see mine action as an enabler for undertaking other activities. UNDP has provided support to the national mine action authority and helped improve national capacity, legislation, and victim assistance. The gaps include a lack of indicators, baseline information, institutional capacity, and resources. The aims of the programme include people being able to return home, the release of land and access to facilities for survivors. UNDP priorities include establishing a sound national mine action structure, securing needed financial and technical support, providing EORE and VA, and focussing on survey and clearance efforts.

2.1.3 UNDP Ukraine – Mr Guy Rhodes, CTA and MASC Coordinator. Mr Rhodes joined the meeting via Zoom from Kyiv. He gave an update on the operational situation using a map that showed current humanitarian access, and another map showing mine action progress throughout Ukraine. Mr Rhodes stressed the need for non-technical survey to better define the extent of the ERW problem and to establish a baseline that can be used for planning and prioritization. He then outlined coordination mechanisms used by the Mine Action Sub-Cluster, that involved 22 national

and international partners. A large national capacity already exists in Ukraine, and the sector is rapidly expanding. With regards to equipment, there has been a good international response to requests for equipment and UNDP has developed a tracking tool to help with defining needs, setting priorities and to aid transparency.

Discussion. In question time, the Director GICHD reminded the meeting that the Centre had been active in Ukraine since 2012, and that they had helped with key areas like legislation, information management and national standards. Currently, the Centre is focussing its activities on IM (ongoing remote and in-country support, re-establishing and backing up of IMSMA systems and chairing the national IM working group) and EORE. The Centre has also recently made available the first edition of an Explosive Ordnance Guide for Ukraine. A GICHD delegation visited Ukraine last week and received a request for additional technical support. The representative of Japan said that they had provided US\$3 million to ICRC in February 2022 for risk education and surveys. The EU representative said that they had been supporting HALO and others since 2015. From 2019 to 2021 the EU had funded five projects totalling EUR 7 million. They now plan to adapt and in May 2022 passed an Implementing Decision to provide EUR 20 million to liberated areas over the next 18 months. The United States said that they were in discussion with the Ukraine government to fund the increase in EOD capacity, to help train and equip new demining teams and to fund EORE. The US appreciated the coordination role played by UNDP. Canada has been providing assistance to Ukraine and support the approach taken by UNDP. Canada will give an extra \$2 million to HALO for EORE and have provided bomb suits and other equipment worth \$500,000. Germany expressed concern about the negative effect of the conflict on global food security and referred to the Berlin conference on global food security, being held on the same day. He also noted that the passage of ships was hindered by sea mines. The US said that sea mines were a complex issue and needed to be dealt with by the military (not humanitarian actors).

The power point presentations on Ukraine are available on the MASG website.

2.2 Syria.

2.2.1 UNMAS – Mr Habibulhaq Javed, UNMAS Programme Manager, Syria. Mr Javed gave an update on the mine action situation in Syria. He displayed a map showing the extent of explosive ordnance accidents, which average five per day. Half the population are deemed to be at risk of EO, and men and boys comprise 85% of victims. UNMAS coordinate mine action from three areas – Damascus, and then in the North-East and North-West. UNMAS coordinate cross border and cross-line interventions, which include acting as the mine action centre, EORE activities, survey, EO disposal, registration of partners, VA activities and launching technical guidelines. Ms Ghada Kachachi from UNICEF then outlined the risk of EO to children. UNICEF was using multiple platforms to raise awareness, including school-based programmes, mass media and virtual networks. UNICEF plan to scale up their activities and require \$20 million over the next three years. Mr Javed concluded by outlining the priorities and funding needs for Syria, which include sustaining the work of UNMAS, starting a nation-wide technical survey, and increasing clearance and EORE activities. Due to the complexity of working in Syria, UNMAS estimate they require US\$83 million to undertake these activities.

2.2.2 Drumlanrig Group of NGOs – Ms Najat El Hamri, Regional Director Middle East, MAG. Ms El Hamri spoke about the work of international NGOs in non-Government controlled areas in the North-East of the country. She outlined the number of casualties caused by EO and detailed the economic crisis affecting the area. The North-East Syria Mine Action Office (NESMAO) was established in 2021 to coordinate activities in the area. There is a need for increased survey and EORE activities, and while the security situation is volatile, there is operational space for the NGOs to work. However, funding needs outweigh the available resources. Dedicated, multi-year funding is required.

Discussion. The representative of the ITF said that the ITF was implementing projects in NE Syria, with funding from Austria and Slovenia. Over nine hundred hectares of farmland had been cleared so far and agricultural activities on cleared land had resumed, hence the title of the project Clear & Grow. The ITF programmes included components to empower women and promote de-radicalization.

The power point presentations on Syria are available on the MASG website.

3. BRIEFINGS: THEMATIC UPDATES

3.1 Progress on the Independent Review of the UNMAS Delivery Model. Ms Ilene Cohn informed the MASG that at the direction of the General Assembly, UNMAS had commissioned an independent review of their delivery model. The review was not about UNMAS outputs, but rather a review of the field programme delivery model, which has typically been undertaken in partnership with UNOPS. Dalberg consultants have been engaged to undertake the review and they started in May 2022. The Dalberg report is due in September and the findings will then be presented by the Secretary-General in his reports to the 77th GA. On a final note, Ms Cohn supported the call from Mr Zouev for the creation of a ‘Group of Friends’ for mine action, to complement the MASG, which is solely a donor coordination forum. This Group of Friends would undertake advocacy in support of mine action across the UN system and could include representatives of member states that support mine action, contribute funds to mine action, are affected by explosive ordnance contamination, contribute police or troop to peacekeeping operations in which explosive ordnance poses a challenge to mandate implementation. Groups of Friends have proven extremely useful in advocating for support across the UN system in the areas of Rule of Law (Justice and Corrections), Police, Security Sector Reform and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.

4. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4.1 The representative of the USA gave a brief update on Tajikistan. Tajikistan recently requested an extension of their APMBBC deadline, and they require extra funds to meet their 2025 goals. The USA sees progress in Tajikistan and is providing \$2.25 million dollars of support in 2022, including for mixed male/female teams and for south-south training facilities. The USA suggested that Tajikistan could be a good country for a MASG field visit.

4.2 The representative of the OAS said that there were working closely with Colombia on quality management for land release, utilizing the recently published KPIs from the GICHD. Ecuador recently renewed its MoU with the OAS for mine action support, launching efforts to raise funds and design of a cross-border clearance programme with Ecuador and Peru. The program will create linkages between the development context for affected indigenous communities and the ecosystem. Finally, a mine action side event is being planned for the upcoming OAS General Assembly to be held in Peru during the first week of October (3rd to 5th).

4.3 The Chair advised that the next meeting of the MASG will be held in-person at the French Mission to the UN in New York on 20 October 2022.

5. MEETING CLOSE

The Chair thanked MASG members and observers for their participation in the meeting. He also thanked the USA for funding the post of MASG secretary, and thanked Mr Mansfield for his work in preparing the meeting. He also thanked all the presenters and speakers and said that the minutes of the meeting and the presentations would be made available shortly.

The meeting closed at 13.30 hours (CEST)

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