

## MINUTES

### MASG MEETING OPEN SESSION

Thursday, 10 April 2025

Room F, CICG - Geneva

#### 1. OPENING REMARKS

**1.1 Chair.** The Chair of the meeting, Ambassador David Riley, Permanent Representative of the UK to the Conference on Disarmament, opened the meeting at 13.00 hours and welcomed the 60 MASG members and observers present in the room. He thanked Italy for their work as chair of the MASG during 2023 and 2024. Ambassador Riley then outlined the agenda and format for the meeting. He welcomed the Director UNMAS, Ms Ilene Cohn, and invited her to update the meeting on the work of the United Nations.

**1.2 Director UNMAS.** The Director of UNMAS, Ms Ilene Cohn congratulated Ambassador Riley and the UK for assuming the chair of the MASG. Ms Cohn informed the meeting that the UN Secretary-General had earlier this week held the first UN Executive Committee (EC) meeting focused on Mine Action – convening the Principals of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action (IACG-MA) and the leaders of all UN entities to determine what action can be taken to address the challenges facing this sector. Ms Cohn then outlined some of these challenges.

The first is the challenge of access to deliver mine action in several countries, due to political and security constraints. At the EC meeting the heads of agencies agreed to *deliver strong joint advocacy messages on the threat posed by explosive ordnance, including IEDs, and the need for the international community to continue contributing to mitigate and reduce the threat.* Ms Cohn asked the MASG members to exercise their diplomatic leverage to help facilitate access at the country level whenever it was needed.

The second challenge is the trend in reductions in funding for mine action, particularly flexible, unearmarked or multi-year funding. The disparity in funding was noted between current crisis countries compared with those ‘forgotten’ conflicts, such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Yemen. Ms Cohn asked MASG members to engage other departments in their government that fund the sectors enabled by mine action, to urge them to inquire of their implementing partners whether they have considered and accounted for the EO threat that may obstruct progress in the work being funded. Again, in this regard, the EC members decided that *all members of the IACG-MA (“enabled sectors”) would account for explosive ordnance contamination in their assessments, plans and budgets, when required to advance their own entity’s primary objectives (e.g., agriculture, safe mobility, food security, infrastructure rehabilitation), thus ensuring that survey, clearance, risk education and/or victim assistance needs are addressed cost-effectively and efficiently and do not detain the pursuit of humanitarian, development, early recovery projects.* The other challenge being faced is reduced funding for national capacity building and coordination.

The last challenge noted was the eroding of normative frameworks. Ms Cohn said that MASG members will be very aware of the recent consideration of withdrawal from the CCM and the APBMC, as well as a breakdown in the moral embargos on the use of certain weapons. This is an area of significant concern for the UN and the Secretary-General and was a key point of discussion at the EC meeting on Mine Action. At the SG's explicit direction, UNMAS, ODA and UN partners will ***develop a campaign to engage Member States on the importance of upholding and preserving the norms and principles enshrined in humanitarian disarmament treaties and to communicate mine action interventions as essential to the enjoyment of human rights.*** Ms Cohn requested the support of the MASG and State Parties in amplifying this message and using their influence to emphasize the very positive outcomes the disarmament treaties are producing, and to prevent further withdrawals from the APMBC and CCM.

The full statement of the Director UNMAS is posted on the MASG website at <https://www.mineaction.org/en/resources/documents/masg>

## **2. FEEDBACK FROM CLOSED SESSION OF THE MASG**

**2.1 Feedback.** The Chair explained that the MASG had met in closed session (members only) yesterday (9 April) and in the interests of transparency and partnership, he would regularly provide feedback to the open meeting - which consists of members and observers. In the closed session, the donors had recognized the unique challenges being faced by the sector at present. These include; an increased number of conflicts and new contamination, geo-political changes and funding cuts. Whilst several major donors had warned of the likelihood of future reductions, most other donors said they were maintaining existing levels of funding over the next few years, including multi-year commitments – which was encouraging. The sector needs to look at new and creative funding methods, including innovative financing, non-traditional donors etc. The meeting noted a number of overlapping challenges, but the MASG was committed to use its influence to assist the sector. The MASG will continue to meet twice per year, but with continued dialogue and exchanges between meetings.

## **3. BRIEFINGS: REGIONAL MINE ACTION**

**3.1 Feedback from Ukraine Donor Meeting.** The representative of Switzerland provided an update from the Ukraine Mine Action Partner Coordination Workshop held in Geneva from 7 - 8 April 2025. He said that this was the third such meeting and it was being held mid-way between the Lausanne Ukraine Mine Action Conference held in October 2024 and the next Ukraine Mine Action Conference scheduled in Tokyo in October 2025. Ms Olena Kryvova (GICHD), one of the organizers of the recent meeting, then presented the main outcomes of the meeting. The meeting consisted of four sessions, and each session produced a list of actions, the responsible organization and the target date. The sessions were;

1. Ukraine Mine Action Three Years After: Challenges and Achievements
2. From Policy to Practice in Ukraine's Contamination Challenge

3. Sustainable Partnerships: Experience, Prospects and Opportunities
4. Ukraine's Way: Strengthening National Ownership for Sustainable Growth

The power point presentation on Ukraine, including the details from each session, is available on the MASG website.

**3.2 oPt (Gaza and West Bank).** Mr Luke Irving, the Chief of Mine Action Programmes for UNMAS in Gaza, gave an update on the situation in occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). He started by saying that the numbers of items of ordnance found and the number of victims in the Gaza and the West Bank often quoted, do not represent the full situation, as it has not been possible to undertake baseline surveys. It is highly likely that there are large amounts of UXO in the rubble of buildings. The UN response in Gaza involves coordination and EOD response, and in the West Bank it has been EORE and capacity building. Even though EO disposal is not possible at present, marking of items of UXO has allowed other activities to go on around the marked areas. UNMAS have developed a three-phase plan, consisting of;

- Phase 1 – Ongoing Emergency Response
- Phase 2 – Early Recovery
- Phase 3 – Reconstruction Response

During the recent ceasefire the plan moved to Phase 2, and a significant number of callouts were responded to. However, the situation is now back to Phase 1. UNMAS want to have teams and resources ready when peace comes. Prioritization of tasks will also be key, with communal facilities and services taking priority over individual houses.

In question time, France asked about the destruction of stockpiles of ordnance in Gaza. Mr Irving said that it is assumed that most Hamas stockpiles have been targeted and destroyed during the war, although explosive harvesting from ordnance that is found is a major Israeli concern. The current conflict is preventing the international community from undertaking disposal operations at present. UNDP noted that the approach to EORE may have to be modified, as they had done in Syria, because the traditional methods of 'don't touch and report the item' may not apply, as people are living among contamination. Any contamination maps that are produced are shared with Israel. UNOPS thanked the mine action community for their messages of support following the incident on 19 March, in which a UNOPS staff member was killed. The other five people injured are stable but have life-altering injuries.

The power point presentation on oPt is available on the MASG website.

**3.3 Syria.** Mr Joe McCartan, the Chief of Mine Action Programmes for UNMAS in Syria started his briefing by giving an overview of the UXO contamination levels in Syria and the high number of civilian casualties, which are among the highest in the world at present. In terms of response, areas identified by UNHCR for refugee return are designated high priority. Prior to 9 December 2024, coordination of mine action had been implemented in three distinct areas – Government controlled areas, the North-East and the North-West. Now, the authorities and partners have requested UNMAS to take the lead at the national level and act as the de-facto mine action centre. As a result, monthly coordination and working group meetings have been held. Mr McCartan then outlined the

current opportunities and challenges, including improved access, difficulties with clearance in built up areas and rubble, lack of funding, undervalued EORE and a shortage of VA services.

Mr Ahmed Ekzayez, the Chief Program manager for the White Helmets, then gave a presentation from the perspective of a national NGO. He said that after 17 years the country was entering a new era. Landmines and UXO were a major challenge, and that addressing the issue should be part of the overall recovery and development efforts. Mr Ekzayez said that food security and restoring livelihoods were major priorities, along with getting the new government more organized – such as the recent creation of a Ministry for Emergencies, which is responsible for mine action. The White Helmets were one of the largest local operators in North-West Syria, undertaking EOD, NTS and EORE activities. He outlined the main priorities, such as coordination, state institutions, standards, and increased operations in clearance, EORE, VA and survey. Mr Ekzayez concluded by stressing the need for localization in mine action to obtain the most effective and efficient response.

During Q&A, Italy noted that at a recent conference about Syria held in Brussels, only one country raised the issue of EO contamination. Italy stressed that advocacy and requests from the government authorities were vital to addressing the challenges to recovery posed by contamination across Syria. Slovenia noted it had announced contributions to demining in Syria. Finally, UNICEF said that one challenge with the new government was to ensure that EORE remained as part of the school curriculum, and that the existing support to victims is allowed to continue.

## **4. BRIEFINGS: THEMATIC UPDATES**

**4.1 Innovative Financing and Technological Innovation.** The Director of the GICHD, Ambassador Tobias Privitelli said that given the current challenges, the GICHD emphasized innovation in the sector. He reminded the meeting about the study released last year titled “Innovative Finance for Mine Action: Needs and Potential Solutions”. He then outlined some of the characteristics of some innovative financial models, like frontloading, which has been used successfully to accelerate immunisations of children in the global south and could potentially be adapted for the mine action sector. To progress the work, the GICHD has committed to establish a small Innovative Finance Secretariat, with the aim of overarching responsibility for coordinating the concrete design, advancement and implementation of frontloading for the mine action sector, as well as support the advancement of other relevant innovative finance mechanisms for the mine action sector at a global/multi-country level. In addition, the GICHD intends to establish a Frontloading Technical Working Group, to be composed of diverse range of financial experts to support the structuring of a frontloading mechanism for mine action. The process may also need a ‘Board of Donor States’. A project proposal from the GICHD for this work has been shared with the MASG members and it was favourably received.

The second topic addressed was improving efficiency through innovation. Recognizing the need for coordination and knowledge sharing, last year the GICHD had launched the Explosive Ordnance Risk Reduction (EORR) Innovation Hub. The Hub facilitates research, development, and evaluation of new approaches. In addition, an Innovation Technical Group (ITG) has been established, which has brought together a coalition of over 60 stakeholders, willing to collaborate on the efforts to make innovation more efficient and effective within the sector, ranging from NMAA, Mine Action

Organizations, Academia, Research and Technology organizations and UN. In terms of planned activities, the GICHD is instituting an 'Innovation Award' and the next innovation conference will be held in Luxembourg from 28 to 30 October 2025. In conclusion, Ambassador Privitelli said that the GICHD remains committed to driving forward both financial and operational innovation in the ways that he had just outlined.

## **5. UPDATE FROM OBSERVERS**

**5.1 GICHD.** The GICHD provided a written update on their activities, which is available on the MASG website.

**5.2 Drumlanrig Group of NGOs.** The NPA chair of the Drumlanrig Group of NGOs gave a statement on behalf of the following agencies – DCA, DRC, GICHD, HI, MAG and NPA. He said that our sector is experiencing a fundamental change in its funding landscape, at a time of unprecedented needs. The Drumlanrig Group (DG) is deeply concerned by the many ongoing conflicts and crises in the world where the civilian population are under constant threat of landmines and other explosive weapons. He noted that global humanitarian budgets are facing mounting pressure. The US decision to agree waivers for most of the countries affected by the Foreign Assistance stop order is good news, however the uncertainties for stable funding in the future remain. He urged donors to include the NGOs in their funding discussions and stressed that the long-term value of consistency of support cannot be overstated. The DG is also concerned about some states openly questioning or even withdrawing from the APMBC and CCM. The DG again urged donors to work hard to reverse these developments. Finally, the DG encouraged donors to coordinate their funding in terms of where they fund globally, and in-country among themselves. The DG said they look forward to continuing and strengthened collaboration with MASG members and with other partners in the sector, in a time where it is more needed than ever to work towards our shared goal of protecting civilians.

The full statement by the Drumlanrig Group is available on the MASG website.<sup>1</sup>

**5.3 ITF.** The Director of the ITF, Ambassador Tomaz Lovrencic, said that the ITF had funded work in Syria and the West Bank, as well as its traditional focus of SE Europe. The ITF always works with local partners and had provided comprehensive support in Northern Syria. In the West Bank they had funded victim assistance activities. Ambassador Lovrencic noted that there was only one public hospital functioning in the West bank, and this was the only medical facility available for most mine and UXO victims. However, its capacity was inadequate for the number of victims. He asked the other donors to consider funding local, public hospitals when making their funding decisions.

**5.4 OAS.** Not present.

**5.5 CISR JMU.** The Deputy Director of the Centre for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR), Ms Nicole Neitzey, started by saying that the former Director of CISR, Ms Suzanne Fiederlein had recently retired and had been replaced by Ms Christie Kibby. The Centre continues with its role of research, publications and capacity building. Unfortunately, the Centre had been affected by the

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<sup>1</sup> Note. The HALO Trust is a member of the Drumlanrig Group, but did not attend the MASG meeting and later provided an alternate viewpoint.

recent US funding freeze, which has affected much of its work. Ms Neitzey mentioned the Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction, which has been published for 29 years. Ms Neitzey said that they wanted to continue producing the Journal and made an appeal to donors to provide funding assistance if possible. Details are available on the MASG website.

**5.6 ISU APMBC.** The Director of the ISU APMBC, Mr Juan Carlos Ruan, outlined recent successes of the APMBC. These included Oman completing its Article 5 obligations, and Ecuador and Croatia expected to finish by next year. Greece has completed its stockpile destruction obligations, and the Marshall Islands have joined the convention, leaving only two Pacific Island nations who have not joined. The major concern is the indication from several countries that they intend to leave the convention. In terms of process, the next Intersessional meetings will be held from 17 to 20 June in Geneva, and the next annual Meeting of States Parties (MSP) will also be held in Geneva from 1 to 5 December 2025.

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**6.1 Other Issues.** There were no other issues raised.

**6.2 Next MASG meeting.** The Chair will consult with partners about the location and date for the next MASG meeting. Normally it has been held in New York in October in the margins of the 1<sup>st</sup> Committee meetings. However, holding the second MASG meeting in Geneva in the margins of the APMBC MSP is also an option. The Chair encouraged members and observers to provide their thoughts to him on the location and date for the next MASG meeting.

## **7. MEETING CLOSE**

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked all MASG members and observers for their active participation. He also thanked the US for their ongoing funding of the MASG secretariat. Ambassador Riley stressed that he wanted the MASG to work effectively, and to strengthen cooperation and understanding among donors and other mine action partners.

The meeting closed at 14.45 hours.