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MASG Update

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MASG Update

Excerpted by Chad McCoull [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

The following article highlights the recent activities of the Mine Action Support Group, including updates on the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF. It is excerpted from the United Nations' newsletter covering the period from March to May 2009.

**MINE ACTION
SUPPORT GROUP**

The Mine Action Support Group meets three to four times a year for discussion between donors and mine-action partners of the United Nations. It consists of 27 members and invites representatives from mine-affected countries, as well as mine-action experts and nongovernmental organizations, to attend the meetings.

Updates from UNMAS

Afghanistan. The implementation of the 1388 Workplan saw the creation of new contracts containing 22 Task Orders to all U.N.-supported implementing partners, and adjustments to the expected outcomes of the projects due to the continuing lack of funds. Transition activities included the following: relocation of the Mine Action Coordination Center for Afghanistan,¹ participation in the monthly Disability Stakeholders Coordination Group, finalization of the Disability Support Unit's Action Plan, development of an action plan, and realization of an evaluation workshop for 126 child-protection officers. Mine-action operations continued over the period with 8,696,355 square meters (2,149 acres) of minefield and 20,215,782 square meters (4,995 acres) of former battlefield cleared, resulting in the destruction of 9,922 anti-personnel mines, 130 anti-tank mines, and 264,402 items of unexploded ordnance. Over the same period 133,496 people received mine-risk-education training.

Chad. Since October 2008, The United Nations Mission in Chad/Central African Republic (MINURCAT) Mine Action Unit has been fully operational. Survey and demolition activities continue. As of 30 April, a total of 933 kilometers (579 miles) of roads have been verified. Thus, the initial objective of verifying 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) by 30 June 2009, is almost achieved. MineTech International also conducted demolition of 488 abandoned and unexploded ordnance and 3,106 small ammunitions. Due to the volatile security situation following the rebel attacks in early May, MTI operations were temporarily suspended on 6 May. MINURCAT MAU was expected to resume operations on 18 May with the verification and clearance of the areas where fighting took place. The MAU is also developing emergency mine-risk-education activities with The High National Commission for Demining in order to address the needs of the local population of eastern Chad as well as internally displaced persons and refugees.

Democratic Republic of Congo. To improve its operations-management capacity, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre redeployed its regional offices within three territories. United Nations Mine Action Service and United Nations Office for Project Services technical missions are assisting UNMACC in developing a new concept of operations, developing a quality management system and improving UNMACC's Information Management System for Mine Action database. In addition, UNMACC is now preparing for the development of a victim-assistance strategy. Two demining nongovernmental organizations were set to start deployment and training of additional survey-clearance teams in December 2008; however, due to equipment-importation issues, both NGOs delayed operations until April. Despite the very volatile situation in eastern DRC, mine-action operators have achieved the clearance of 343,000 square meters (85 acres) of land and demolition of 14,000 explosive remnants of war from January to April 2009. UNMACC is currently developing mine-action projects that will assist the U.N. High Commissioner of Refugees in

resettling the thousands of refugees and displaced people.

Nepal. Following the government of Nepal's request for continued U.N. technical assistance to the Nepal Army in October 2008, the United Nations Mine Action Team was established under the responsibility of the U.N. Resident Coordinator. UNMAT is assisting the Nepal Army Mine Action Centre to sustain operational capacity independently. To achieve this objective, training in management and operational planning has been ongoing, and additional evaluations, recommendations, and trainings have already been implemented for 2009. As of April 2009, the demining platoons completed clearance of 10 Nepal Army minefields, with a total of 22,630 square meters (5.59 acres) cleared and 1,600 mines destroyed; it was expected that a third demining platoon would deploy shortly, and that five to six additional minefields would be cleared before the monsoon season starts in August. UNMAT is preparing a project for the demolition of the residual improvised explosive devices within the seven Maoist cantonments; it is planned that the operation will be implemented by Maoist explosive-ordnance-disposal specialists under UNMAT supervision, and completed by the end of 2009.

South Lebanon. In April 2009, the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Centre closed down the former Mine Action Coordination Centre in Tyre, (South Lebanon) and relocated the remaining UNMACC staff to the United Nations Interim Force's base in Naqoura to better support UNIFIL clearance and EOD assets. UNMACC continues its liaison function between the Lebanon Mine Action Center and UNIFIL. UNMACC has continued its work to support UNIFIL demining teams on the Blue Line Barrel marking project and in April commenced coordination and management of clearance for the Blue Line Access Road, supported by mechanical assets from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB). Strike data, obtained from Israel, is being analyzed and compared with the strikes located and submunitions and UXO cleared since August 2006. Since the ceasefire in August 2006, incidents involving UXO, including cluster munitions, have killed 28 people and injured 242. Among clearance personnel, 43 have been injured and 14 have been killed.

Sudan. United Nations Missions in Sudan mine-action teams continued to work on the prioritized opening of primary and secondary routes, taking advantage of the dry season. To date, over 29,700 kilometers (18,455 miles) of roads have been opened. All five UNMIS demining contingents continued their demining activities. Increased achievements were made during the reporting period thanks to good weather and full deployment of the available demining assets. To date, 2,688 of the 4,302 identified dangerous areas have been cleared, over 44.6 million square meters (11,021 acres) of suspected dangerous areas have been cleared, and some 14,730 anti-personnel mines, 2,940 anti-tank mines, 837,500 pieces of UXO and 1,060,000 small-arms ammunitions have been destroyed. This accomplishment includes the clearance of Lobanok minefield in Central Equatoria, Katcha minefield in South Kordofan and Kurmuk minefield in Blue Nile. Mine-risk education was provided to more than 2,715,383 people to date, in cooperation with UNICEF.

South-central Somalia. Currently UNMAS is conducting mine-risk education and medical teams are providing support to the Baidoa hospital until the resumption of clearance operations. The United Nations Somalia Mine Action Programme (UNSOMA) will equip and begin training three persons from The African Union Mission to Somalia EOD teams and establish a temporary safe explosive storage facility and offices in collaboration with Mines Advisory Group. UNSOMA is also participating in a risk assessment, which will determine the level of U.N. programming and missions in Mogadishu in the next three to six months.

Western Sahara. Landmine Action started concentrating its efforts on clearance or marking of 200 identified dangerous areas. The large-scale mine-clearance project conducted by the Royal Moroccan Army continued in the western parts of the territory. The Senior Mine Action Adviser to MINURSO continued identifying ways to provide technical assistance to the RMA demining program, in particular for improving their survey techniques. Technical assistance provided installation of the information management system in March 2009 and modern mine detectors.

UNDP Updates

Albania. The demining operations in northeast Albania are being carried out with seven local demining teams and one Technical Survey team under the monitoring of the Albanian Mine Action Executive quality-management team. The total contaminated area remaining for clearance is 858,600 square meters (212 acres), out of which 325,100 square meters (80 acres) are mined areas while 533,500 square meters (132 acres) are battle areas contaminated with UXO/cluster munitions. According to the National Mine Action Completion Plan, the clearance of these areas should be done by the end of 2009, making Albania compliant with its Article 5 obligations. The demining season began in March after a suspension during winter months. As of the end of April 2009 some 70,507 square meters (17 acres) had been cleared of mines and UXO in eight working areas. In these areas, 41 anti-personnel mines, one anti-tank mine, 93 cluster submunitions and six items of UXO were found and destroyed by the demining teams. The last mine accident was recorded in 2005 in northeast Albania. In 2008-09, 21 upper-limb-amputee mine victims and other difficult cases

were treated in Slovenia with prostheses and rehabilitation.

Cambodia. The United Nations Development Programme continues to support mine-action activities through the UNDP-managed project, *Clearing for Results: A partnership for landmine action in Cambodia* (2006–2010). With UNDP support, the Cambodian Mine Action Authority developed a new direction for mine action aimed at focusing mine clearance in the 21 most-affected districts. Three humanitarian-demining operators have agreed to undertake a landmine baseline survey in these districts. The 2010 mine-clearance planning process is on track for completion. The CMAA added two quality-assurance teams to monitor mine-action activities, bringing the total number of QA teams to six. More than 500 landmine survivors and other people with disabilities, community leaders, monks and police attended a munitions-awareness-raising event.

Ethiopia. A representative for the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Ethiopia had successfully fulfilled its Article 4 obligations to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban on stockpile destruction. The Ethiopian Mine Action Office continues making steady progress toward the clearance of landmines in the country to fulfill Article 5 obligations and to support the implementation of Ethiopia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Between January and March 2009, EMAO released 2,202,261 square meters (544 acres) of previously landmine-contaminated land or 38 percent of the 2009 annual clearance target of suspected hazardous areas 5,861,000 square meters (1,448 acres) to the local communities for their productive use in the Tigray, Afar and Somali regions. During the operations, 171 anti-personnel landmines, 101 anti-vehicle mines, and 2,436 pieces of UXO were found and destroyed. Along with mine clearance, MRE and community-liaison services were provided to 18,890 people residing in and around the EMAO's operational areas. As a result, the recipients of MRE reported to the EMAO about the locations of three anti-personnel mines, three anti-tank mines and 808 pieces of UXO for subsequent disposal by the EMAO's EOD specialists.

Iraq. UNDP helped publish a report on mine action called "Overview of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War in Iraq." It also helped organize a mechanical training course in Erbil from 3–7 May for the staff of the government mine-action institutions. The four-day course included topics such as risk assessment and management, environmental considerations during mechanical demining, the use of demining machines and types of ground-preparation machines, and field practice for future task assessment and planning.

Three NGOs completed planned physical and socioeconomic rehabilitation projects in the Kurdistan region. From the start of the project to April 2009, these three NGOs provided 9,118 physiotherapy services, 3,374 mobility aids, and 3,769 orthotic or prosthetic devices to people with disabilities. Thirty-four participants graduated from carpentry, blacksmith, computer, tailor and leather workshops, and 110 income-generation projects and 36 house modifications for easier access and movements were completed. Some key challenges being faced include the political fallout and operational impact of the directive issued in December 2008 by the Iraqi Ministry of Defence to cease all humanitarian-demining operations in Iraq, excluding those in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Since then, mine-action organizations have been unable to proceed with clearance operations.

Mozambique. The Mozambique National Demining Institute continued to provide guidance and coordination for all stakeholders in the mine-action sector working toward the goals set out in the National Mine Action Plan through the approved extension period until March 2014. Maintaining adequate levels of funding continues to be a challenge and a constraint to the mine-action program, and most directly to maintaining current operational capacity by all implementing partners. The annual mine-action meeting was an opportunity to present the approval process of the Article 5 extension request and the recommended implementation for the country to conclude demining by 2014. Clearance activities continued throughout five provinces by the three humanitarian operators.

Sri Lanka. The UNDP Mine Action Support Project assists the Government of Sri Lanka to coordinate and manage mine actions in the conflict-affected districts of the North and East. The project is prioritizing the establishment of a National Mine Action Center in Sri Lanka, which will serve as the national operational coordinating body for mine action in the country. An international consultant, contracted by UNDP, has drafted a terms of reference and a gender strategy for the NMAC through an extensive consultation process. UNDP is funding six full-time government mine-action positions and handing over the IMSMA function at the national level to the government. Between 1 March and 15 May 2009, 298,395 square meters (74 acres) of land was cleared and made accessible to internally displaced persons for resettlement and productive uses. Between November 2008 and 15 May 2009, the government assigned several new mine/UXO survey and clearance tasks in Mannar and Jaffna. In order to meet the accelerated demands for demining in the north and to continue supporting mine/UXO clearance in the east, the UNDP Support Project is increasing its human- and technical-resource capacities, including recruiting three international Technical Advisors.

Uganda. To eliminate the threat of ERW in Uganda and to assist efforts toward compliance with Article 5 obligations by 1 August 2009, UNDP continued its support to the national mine-action program through the Uganda Mine Action

Centre and relevant ministries. National teams routinely conduct clearance operations and EOD in addition to community-liaison tasks. Activities undertaken from 1 March to the end of April 2009 include the clearance of 155,144 square meters (38 acres) of contaminated land that involved the destruction of eight mines, 461 pieces of UXO, and 474 small arms ammunition and cluster submunitions. Two areas in the mountains are the only remaining minefields in Uganda, and these areas are presently undergoing Technical Survey and clearance activities carried out by nine UMAC demining teams. Land-release criteria are also being developed and will be implemented by the teams to handle 148 remaining suspected hazardous areas. MRE teams delivered sessions in 61 primary schools and 25 villages, benefiting 1,368 men, 1,651 women, 5,192 boys and 4,790 girls. A total of 693 educational T-shirts and 802 ERW warning posters were distributed as well.

Yemen. UNDP Yemen and the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre have initiated the preparation of a joint resource mobilization initiative for the Yemen mine-action program in line with the government of Yemen's National Mine Action Strategy 2009–14, to take into account the approved Article 5 Extension Request to 1 March 2015, for completing the destruction of its anti-personnel mines. The major achievements of the Yemen mine-action program during the first quarter of 2009 included clearance of 1,131,299 square meters (280 acres) with landmines and UXO items discovered and destroyed during the period totaling 36,531, out of which there were 18 anti-personnel mines, eight anti-tank mines, and 36,505 pieces of UXO. Mine-risk education was provided to 37,410 individuals in mine-affected areas in 30 villages. Landmine victim assistance included the provision of medical survey to 78 survivors and 58 medical-support cases to 42 victims, ranging from hearing aids to wheelchairs.

UNICEF Updates

Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the period from February to May 2009, UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to provide technical, financial and logistical support to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre and to other implementing agencies involved in MRE. UNICEF BiH will support MRE implementation in four pilot municipalities in 2009. Two municipal MRE plans are expected to begin in June 2009, while the other two locations will be determined according to the BHMACE prioritization process for 2009. In February, the GENESIS Project, a local NGO, started implementing a school-based project on landmine- and small-arms-risk education in 10 BiH locations highly affected by landmines. By the end of June, the project provided MRE and SA risk education to 300 school teachers, 200 children through comprehensive and direct peer-education workshops and 2,000 children through an MRE/SALW puppet show performed once per age group for children in school.

Democratic Republic of the Congo. From February to May 2009, UNICEF continued to support mine-risk education in five mine- and ERW-affected provinces in DRC in collaboration with national and international NGOs. The major achievements in MRE during the reporting period, with support from the government of Japan, included 72,948 people in 184 communities reached through 292 information campaigns and 93 areas identified as dangerous. Fifteen people were injured by mines. In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, MRE supported two key activities for the education system: development of an MRE curriculum and a guide for teachers including relevant education and communication materials to facilitate behavior change (posters and other materials), especially targeting school-aged children. In collaboration with the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Centre, UNICEF assisted with impact analysis of 12 national and international NGOs during their accreditation process.

Guinea Bissau. MRE in Guinea Bissau involve 360 activists and includes teachers, women and youth-association representatives, community radio journalists, health workers, religious leaders, community representatives and concerned ordinary citizens. As a result of the lack of funding for MRE from early 2007 until the beginning of 2009, no educational material was produced or distributed, no monitoring or refresher training was held, and community radio programs, which require a small financial contribution for production costs, ceased. The National Mine Action Coordination Centre of Guinea Bissau MRE team was able to visit some of the most affected regions to monitor, support and motivate the activists, distribute educational material, update data on accidents, and meet with officials of the Senegal Mine Action Centre on the northern border. Work with community radio was reinitiated. UNICEF began preparations for a study on the impact of the MRE activities on knowledge, attitudes and practices. The findings of the study were used to inform, analyze and develop the strategic communications plan for MRE in Guinea Bissau, which is expected to be completed in June.

Iraq. In 2009, UNICEF Iraq's MRE program focused its support on reducing the impact of mines and ERW on children and young people through strengthening national capacity to plan, manage and implement MRE activities; promotion of safe behavior using media, schools and community-based MRE; and the setting up of a victim-tracking mechanism. During the reporting period, UNICEF supported an MRE survey in three northern governorates and an MRE needs assessment in four central governorates, as well as providing MRE to populations in six affected governorates. MRE reached 107 communities and 3,133 community members in central Iraq. In addition, 360 community leaders,

religious leaders, social workers, school teachers and journalists working in mine-contaminated areas in three localities received MRE orientation and have now established a network for community liaison. Twenty-five participants reviewed the existing provisional standard and prepared a framework for the new MRE strategy. During the Gaza crisis in early 2009, UNICEF Iraq supported the UNICEF country office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with 3,000 copies of MRE board games and a digital copy of a recreational coloring book with MRE messages, which was adapted to the OPT context, and printed and distributed by UNICEF in Gaza. The recent banning of civilian demining by the Ministry of Defence has added another challenge to keeping children and other mine-affected population safe.

Lao People's Democratic Republic. Information from the National Regulatory Authority's survey of UXO victims indicates that of the approximately 300 annual casualties, 100 are killed and 200 injured on average; tragically, about 40 percent of all victims are children. On 3 December 2008, when the Convention on Cluster Munitions was opened for signature in Norway, the Lao government signed and has been recognized as a leader in the CCM process. Recently, the government has ratified the convention and has offered to host the first CCM Meeting of States Parties in late 2010. UNICEF Laos continues to provide technical and financial support to the MRE unit of the NRA, which is responsible for MRE messages on high-risk groups such as scrap-metal traders, farmers and children. UNICEF is also supporting the printing of the UXO Supplementary School Curriculum books, lesson plans, related materials and MRE posters that will be distributed to 1,761 primary schools in nine provinces and 37 districts, as well as to other MRE operators. The first part of 2009 focused on the development of baseline information, in addition to the completion of the second round of 1,500 interviews for a knowledge, attitudes and practices survey and data entry and analysis, as well as the production of four short films on the dangers of UXO.

Nepal. Thirty-six representatives from 18 districts received training and emergency MRE kits. These representatives provide emergency and regular MRE in the most affected communities. The first version of the Resource Manual for MRE in Nepal for the Ministry of Education was completed in April. National level trainers, resource persons and teachers, who will provide MRE to schoolchildren, use the manual in conjunction with MRE materials. The national emergency mine-risk-education network, composed of 430 governmental, Red Cross and NGO representatives, has the capacity to quickly deploy emergency MRE activities in 68 affected districts. UNICEF provided MRE orientation and materials to 24 village facilitators from four remote districts in April. From 1 February 2009 to 30 April 2009, a total of 18 casualties resulted from eight victim-activated explosions. This figure is a decrease in comparison to the same period from previous years.

Occupied Palestinian Territory. Three weeks of intensive bombardment by air, ground and sea, and ground incursions by Israel into Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009 resulted in an estimated 1,326 Palestinians killed and 5,450 Palestinians injured. With 25,000 dunums (6,177 acres) of agricultural land ruined and more than 15,000 homes, 180 schools and 41 health clinics destroyed or severely damaged, all parts of Gaza are at risk of UXO. UNICEF printed and distributed 100,000 leaflets on the risks posed by UXO. Since January, an additional 100,000 leaflets, 100,000 board games and 100,000 recreational/coloring books were produced and provided to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society for distribution in schools and in the community. By April 2009, 205 teachers had conducted MRE sessions and trainings to more than 4,100 children. UNICEF is working with all mine-action, rubble-removal and MRE actors to develop solutions to creatively fill these gaps in a constrained operational context.

Sri Lanka. UNICEF continues supporting MRE in six mine- and ERW-affected northern and eastern districts in collaboration with national NGOs, a volunteer and child animator network, and the Ministry of Education. Community-based MRE reached approximately 34,000 people in the first quarter. War-injured people treated in Vavuniya are predominantly victims from shelling, although at least 27 recent mine victims were confirmed. Thousands of people are severely injured and disabled. Data collection is underway and a consolidated response was prepared through Ministries, UNICEF and aid agencies. Advocacy for acceding to the AP Mine Ban Convention and other relevant legal instruments is difficult given the current focus on the war in the Vanni. ↴



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Endnotes

1. In 2009, the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan rebranded itself as the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan to reflect the increasing national ownership of the program. See <http://www.macca.org.af> for more information.

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