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MASG Update

Excerpted by Leah Young [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

The following article highlights the recent activities of the Mine Action Support Group,¹ 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 November 2008–February 2009.



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. As the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan prepares to commence implementation of the 1388 Workplan, a wide range of operational activities continues to be restricted by significant funding shortages.

Despite the dearth of funding, currently funded mine-action assets are continuing operations throughout the country. These operations include the establishment and deployment of Community-based Demining Teams in the south and east of the country.

In order to better represent its work in Afghanistan, the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan has also been renamed the Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan. The MACCA will continue to be supported by the United Nations and the government of Afghanistan, which works alongside the Centre through the Department of Mine Clearance.

Chad. UNMAS deployed a core mine-action unit as part of the mission for Chad/Central African Republic to remediate contamination from explosive remnants of war and possible landmines² near the border areas of eastern Chad.

MINETECH, a commercial operator, has been contracted to meet the mine-action operational needs of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT). MINETECH deployed to Abéché, and in December 2008 started route-verification activities between Abéché and Farchana and Abéché and Iriba.

Democratic Republic of the Congo. Operational mine-action activities continued under the coordination of the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre. UNMACC established two new regional offices, one in Kisangani (Orientale) and one in Goma (North Kivu). In October–November 2008, the security situation significantly deteriorated in the eastern part of the country, forcing operations to be temporarily suspended and assets redeployed to safer areas.

Eritrea. With the expiration of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea mandate, the UNMEE Mine Action Coordination Centre has also closed. The MACC donated some equipment to the Eritrean Demining Authority and the

Ethiopian Mine Action Office.

Nepal. Training and supervision of four Nepalese Army demining teams continued but was interrupted during the monsoon season. As of October 2008, clearance of eight Nepalese Army minefields had been completed, and planning of additional clearance operations was underway. The government of Nepal formally requested continued U.N. technical assistance to the Nepalese Army in October 2008 in order to fully comply with the obligations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006. In this respect, the United Nations Mine Action Team was established under the responsibility of the U.N. Resident Coordinator with funding channeled through the U.N. Nepal Peace Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.

South Lebanon. Beginning 1 January 2009, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre–South Lebanon transferred primary responsibility for the coordination of humanitarian mine-clearance operations to the Lebanese Mine Action Centre, which forms part of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Between August 2006 and February 2009, a total of 1,062 cluster-munitions locations were recorded. The estimated contaminated area was increased to 48.1 million square meters (11,886 acres) following an operational reassessment in 2008.

Since the ceasefire in August 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah, incidents involving unexploded ordnance, including cluster munitions, have killed 27 people and injured 238. Among clearance personnel, 43 have been injured and 14 killed.

Sudan. Taking advantage of the dry season, United Nations Mission in Sudan mine-action teams continued to work on the opening of primary and secondary routes in the Nuba Mountains, Ed Damazin, Juba, Rumbek, Wau, Yei and Malakal. To date, over 29,700 kilometers) of suspected hazardous areas have been cleared and some 13,940 anti-personnel mines, 2,830 anti-tank mines, 837,500 pieces of unexploded ordnance and 562,800 small-arms ammunitions have been destroyed.

United Nation Mine Action Office, together with the Sudan Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, National Mine Action Centre and South Sudan Demining Commission, has completed a series of workshops to develop a transition framework for achieving full national ownership of the mine-action program in Sudan by 2011.

In Darfur specifically, there have been a number of reports received by the U.N. on UXO incidents in local villages and internally displaced persons camps due to the ongoing fighting in Darfur; however, the United Nations continues to classify the entire Darfur region as Security Phase 4.³ The U.N. also forced relocation of non-essential staff to outside the Darfur region and restricted movement of United Nations Mine Action Office staff and demining contractors. All of the Mine Action Teams must have United Nations- African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) military escorts, making it difficult to provide emergency responses to reported ERW incidents. Despite these challenges and constraints, UNMAO and its contractors worked closely with UNAMID, United Nations Department of Safety and Security and local governments to support the deployment of UNAMID peacekeepers and conduct the necessary assessment of UXO destruction in villages where access was possible.

Western Sahara. UNMAS continued supporting the landmine and ERW survey and clearance activities being implemented by the U.K.-based nongovernmental agency Landmine Action in the eastern parts of Western Sahara. By the end of 2008, a survey of those areas was completed, and LMA started concentrating its efforts on clearance of dangerous areas. The large-scale mine-clearance project conducted by the Royal Moroccan Army continued in the western parts of the territory. Unfortunately, January 2009 saw a notable spike in mine/UXO accidents.

Somalia. The security situation remains fragile in the country and has hindered operations in some areas. Following a Technical Assessment, it was decided that UNMAS will conduct mine action in south-central Somalia, and the United Nations Development Programme will conduct mine action in Puntland and Somaliland.

Updates from UNDP

Angola. An estimated 2.4 million people live in landmine/UXO-impacted communities, with 0.6 million living in high- or medium-impact communities. It is estimated that approximately 17 percent of all citizens are living in the 1,988 mine-impacted communities. The main achievements in 2008 included the completion of the Angola Landmine Impact Survey, which was disseminated to all mine-action stakeholders in Angola. Further assistance has been given to update and maintain the mine-action database in order to obtain more adequate data on the landmine problem in Angola and its impact on communities.

Cambodia. Through its Mine Action Programme in Cambodia, UNDP is assisting the Cambodian Mine Action Authority to ensure that mine action is conducted in a coordinated manner and that prioritization of clearance activities is taking place in support of national development plans.

UNDP also funds the Cambodian Mine Action Centre to carry out clearance activities in accordance with government priorities. In 2008, 8,935 anti-personnel mines, 220 anti-tank mines, and 34,137 pieces of UXO were found and destroyed through the Programme, clearing up 6,788,437 square meters (1,677 acres) of land.

Chad. In November 2008, the request for an extension of the deadline for completing the destruction of anti-personnel mines under Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention⁴ was accepted by State Parties.

The GICHD is also continuing research into various new technical survey methods, and this information will be published later in 2009. In conjunction with this, the GICHD has provided practical advice and assistance to mine-affected countries in the development of land-release policies and processes. These have included, among others, Angola, Cambodia, Chad, Laos and Mozambique.

For 2009, the government of Chad intends to strengthen its efforts in ERW and mine clearance by

- Increasing capacity for UXO clearance efforts in the east and southeast
- Creating rapid-response teams
- Conducting a large-scale Technical Survey
- Continuing demining operations
- Implementing the Information Management System for Mine Action management deployment plan
- Developing the National Mine Victims Assistance Strategy

Egypt. The purpose of the North West Coast Development and Mine Action Program in Egypt is to support the implementation of the cabinet-approved National Plan for the Development of the North West Coast and Inland Desert, which aims to clear landmines to facilitate development in the entire area.

With support from UNDP, a field office was established in Marsa Matrouh. While liaising with the governor's office on mine-action-related issues, the office will also deal with mine-victim-assistance activities.

Ethiopia. During 2008, the Ethiopian Mine Action Office released 8,358,882 square meters (2,065,299 acres) of previously landmine-contaminated land, totaling 143 percent of the 2008 annual clearance target of suspected hazardous areas, or about 5,861,000 square meters (1,448,279 acres), to the local communities for their productive use in the Tigray, Afar and Somali regions. During the operations, 1,371 anti-personnel landmines, 378 anti-vehicle mines and 17,666 pieces of UXO were found and destroyed.

In addition, significant results were achieved in area reduction and land release through Technical Survey, handing over a total of 450 square kilometers (280 square miles) of previously suspected hazardous areas to 141 communities for immediate productive use. Mine-risk education and community-liaison services were provided to 42,918 people (28,385 males and 14,533 females), residing in and around EMAO's operational areas. As a result, the recipients of MRE reported to EMAO the location of 21 anti-personnel mines, 20 anti-tank mines and 11,315 pieces of UXO for subsequent disposal by EMAO's explosive-ordnance disposal specialists.

Iraq. The key objective for the UNDP-supported Mine Action Programme in Iraq is to develop an Iraqi mine-action authority, which currently is under reorganization/restructuring, to be effective, efficient and independent within the Ministry of Environment as well as to mainstream mine action into the reconstruction and development of Iraq. Furthermore, the Programme aims to increase national clearance capacity while providing support to the government of Iraq to comply with its Ottawa Convention obligations.

UNDP continued to support an Iraqi humanitarian mine-action NGO based in Basra. UNDP, together with an international monitoring partner Danish Demining Group, cleared 3,455,575 square meters (853,749 acres) of land from 20,633 explosive items (including 289 cluster munitions), releasing the land for agricultural use in the period 1 October–22 December 2008.

Jordan. UNDP has been providing technical support to the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation for several years with the aim of developing the capacity of the NCDR to execute its role as the national mine-action authority and prepare it to play a larger regional role. Volunteer MRE providers attended refresher courses in August and September 2008 before the start of the second phase of the MRE program, which targets 25 mine-affected communities. New MRE materials were produced, including an animated cartoon about the myths of mines, an MRE-

themed coloring book and a new MRE song by schoolchildren from a mine-affected community.

Lebanon. UNDP continued to provide support to the Lebanon Mine Action Centre, whose main role is to provide government oversight and coordination for all mine-action activities in Lebanon, including clearance, mine-risk education and victim assistance. Furthermore, UNDP continued to provide technical support to United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency for UXO clearance of Nahr al-Bared Camp in northern Lebanon.

The Lebanese Mine Action Authority assumed full national authority for mine action in Lebanon on 1 January 2009.

Mozambique. The Mozambique National Demining Institute continued to provide government coordination and guidance for all stakeholders in the mine-action sector working toward the goals set out in the National Mine Action Plan 2008–2012.

During the second half of 2008, efforts were concentrated on preparing the extension request to the deadline for completing the destruction of mines in accordance with Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention. The extension request was approved during the Ninth Meeting of States Parties in November 2008.

Demining activities, in synergy with the national socioeconomic plans targeted at development programs, continued during the second half of 2008 and resulted in the clearance of a total of 2,242,792 square meters (55,401 acres), in which 1,139 mines and 844 pieces of UXO were removed and destroyed.

Mine-risk education sessions reached more than 40,000 people, with 109 sessions held in communities living in the vicinity of mine-contaminated areas. Additionally, 164 community agents were trained in MRE techniques.

Somalia. UNDP Somalia, as an integrated part of its Rule of Law and Security Programme, has been engaged in mine-action activities in Somalia for more than eight years, with its main focus on Somaliland and Puntland regions. By the end of 2007, UNDP also established a mine-action presence in South Central Somalia, focusing mainly on mine-risk education, explosive-ordnance disposal and survey.

An interagency assessment mission was deployed 7–18 January 2009, based on the request from the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia in light of a deteriorating security situation for UNDP, including direct threats and attacks in October 2008.

Based on the inter-agency mission findings and recommendations, and in response to the letter from the Resident and Humanitarian Representative, UNMAS, as of early February 2009, has taken over operational activities for mine action in south-central Somalia, with UNDP Somalia retaining responsibility for capacity development and mine action in Somaliland and Puntland.

Sudan. UNDP Sudan finalized its Mine Action Capacity Development Support Project Document for the period 2009–2011. The key objective of the project document is to strengthen the institutional capacity of Southern Sudan Demining Commission and National Mine Action Center to be able to manage mine action in Sudan in accordance with International Mine Action Standards as well as enhance the linkages between mine action and development and recovery projects in Sudan.

A mine-action transition plan for Sudan was finalized on 28 November 2008, in a workshop that senior representatives from the NMAC, SSDC, UNMAS, UNDP and UNICEF attended.

Tajikistan. UNDP continued its support to the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre in order to eliminate the threat of mines in the country. TMAC independently manages the MRE, victim assistance, clearance task orders, quality assurance/quality control and the International Networking and Information Management tasks. The Swiss Foundation for Mine Action is implementing clearance of mines/UXO under the supervision of TMAC.

MRE activities continued in 22 districts of the country and a number of workshops and roundtable discussions were held for MRE volunteers, village leaders, media, Ministry of Education, and regional border committees in order to enhance collaboration and transparency.

The completion deadline for the Tajikistan Ottawa Convention Article 5 Commitment is 1 April 2010. TMAC, together with partners and implementation agencies, reviewed the status and undertook all possible surveys to determine the actual level of contamination. Based on this assessment, TMAC has decided to seek a further extension to its Ottawa Convention commitment.

Yemen. UNDP continued to provide both technical and financial support to the national mine-action activities in

Yemen. Assistance is being channeled through the National Mine Action Committee, as the national mine-action authority, and its implementation agency, the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre.

The major achievement of the Yemen Mine Action Programme in 2008 included clearance of 3,482,452 square meters (860,421 acres) of land, out of which 1,058,872.5 square meters (261,437 acres) were cleared by the mine-detection-dog group. Moreover, 70 AP mines, 18 AT mines and 26,322 pieces of UXO were destroyed. Mine-risk education was provided to 177,499 people in 121 villages in the mine-affected areas, 94,743 of whom were men and 82,756 of whom were women.

Mine-victim assistance covered 89 villages in 19 districts, including 586 medical surveys (515 males and 71 females) and 286 medical examinations (243 males and 43 females). Medical support to mine survivors was diverse, covering 198 cases during the period.

Updates from UNICEF

Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the period of October 2008 to January 2009, UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to provide technical, financial and logistical support mainly to the BiH Mine Action Centre and to implementing agencies involved in mine-risk education.

During this period, UNICEF's and the BHMACE's cooperation was focused on the development of MRE and landmine-victim assistance sub-strategies for the period 2009–2019.

In January, UNICEF supported the implementation of one MRE quality-assurance course, where 17 participants from different NGOs, governmental organizations and the BHMACE staff were trained on standard operating procedures for QA in MRE activities and mechanisms of quality assurance. BHMACE personnel implemented and supervised the training.

Cambodia. UNICEF continues to provide technical and financial support to the mine-action sector for national MRE coordination. Support is provided through the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority, community-based mine-risk reduction, unexploded-ordnance-risk reduction through the police and scrap-metal dealers, the mass-media campaign through the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, and school-based MRE for children.

In January 2009, Cambodia Mine Victims Information System data-gatherers provisionally reported 34 new casualties from 15 mine/ERW accidents in 10 different provinces. The figures for January 2009 represent an increase of 31 percent, compared with the 26 casualties reported in January 2008. The total number of casualties reported from January to December 2008 reached 266.

Democratic Republic of the Congo. From October 2008 to January 2009, UNICEF and its partners' major achievements in mine-risk education, with support from the government of Japan, included 55,204 people in 222 communities reached through information campaigns and 74 areas identified as dangerous. Ten mine accidents occurred during the reporting period. The information campaigns include the deployment of 400 storyboards, 5,000 posters, 10,000 comics and 35,000 leaflets—all with standardized messages. These materials will be distributed in the most severely landmine- and UXO-affected areas beginning in March 2009. The development of school-based communication materials began in November 2008.

Nepal. To date, the national emergency MRE network, composed of 409 governmental, Red Cross and NGO focal points, has the capacity to deploy MRE activities in 68 affected districts in a timely manner.

UNICEF and UNMAS continued to work with government partners, advocating for the necessity of a national mine-action authority to ensure a national solution to the landmine/ERW problem in the country.

Sri Lanka. UNICEF continues supporting MRE for the mine- and ERW-affected northern and eastern provinces mainly through the Ministry of Education, national NGOs, and a volunteer and child animator network.

Advocacy for the AP Mine Ban (Ottawa) Convention and other relevant legal instruments is a difficult issue given the current focus on the war in Vanni. A Sri Lankan Campaign to Ban Landmines does not exist as of now and UNICEF, jointly with UNDP, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and other key partners, is assessing ways to revive the campaign. 🇱🇰

Biography



Leah Young has been working at *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* since January 2008. She is from Virginia Beach, Virginia, and completed a Bachelor of Science in justice studies with a minor in Spanish at James Madison University in May 2009.

Endnotes

1. Additional information about the Mine Action Support Group is available online at <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/wra/c17719.htm>.
2. **Editor's Note:** Some organizations consider mines and ERW to be two separate entities, since they are regulated by different legal documents (the former by the Ottawa Convention and Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the latter by CCW Protocol V). However, since mines are explosive devices that have similar effects to other ERW and it is often impossible to separate the two during clearance operations, some in the community have adopted a "working definition" (as opposed to a legal one) of ERW in which it is a blanket term that includes mines, UXO, abandoned explosive ordnance and other explosive devices.
3. According to the United Nations, Security Phase 4 is defined as Program Suspension, where "All internationally-recruited staff who are not directly concerned with emergency or humanitarian relief operations or security matters are relocated outside the country." More information can be found at <http://www.aidworkers.net/?q=unsecurityphases>. Accessed 22 June 2009.
4. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*, Oslo, Norway. 18 September 1997. The document was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, 3 December 1997, commonly known as the Ottawa Convention. <http://www.icbl.org/treaty/text/english>. Accessed 15 June 2009.

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