

Mine Action Support Group Update

This article contains excerpts from the United Nations' third quarterly newsletter, which highlights the activities of the Mine Action Support Group from July to September 2006, including updates from the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF.¹

excerpted by Stacy Davis [United States Department of State]

MINE ACTION SUPPORT GROUP

The Mine Action Support Group meets four times a year to facilitate discussion between donors and U.N. mine-action partners. The MASG has 27 members and invites representatives from mine-affected countries, experts and nongovernmental organizations to share information about mine action in their countries. The group's goal is to simplify donor coordination and ease funding. The United States chaired the group in 2006 and will continue to do so through 2007.

Developments in UNMAS Programs

Afghanistan. Over the summer, an excess of 6.5 million square meters (1,606 acres) of minefields and 29 million square meters (7,166 acres) of former battlefields were cleared, while 7.4 million square meters (1,829 acres) of minefields and 3.95 million square meters (976 acres) of former battlefields were surveyed. This brings the totals for performance since 1989 to 420 million square meters (103,784 acres) of minefields and 630 million square meters (155,676 acres) of former battlefields surveyed, and 369 million square meters (91,181 acres) of minefields and 753 million square meters (186,070 acres) of former battlefields cleared. Under the supervision of 21 quality-management teams directed by the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan, 125 manual-clearance teams, 44 mechanical teams, 33 mine-dog groups, 76 survey teams and 60 explosive-ordnance-disposal teams implemented this work. Ninety mine-risk-education teams operate nationally including community- and clinic-based personnel, mobile cinemas and encashment centers, and from January to September 2006 the teams reached over 720,000 people in direct campaigns. As of September 30, 2006, there were over 360 persons

injured and 60 killed according to statistics, but such incidents are considered to be under-reported.

Security is a problem in the country, with operations in the south and east disrupted both by security incidents and Afghan and international military force operations. Mine-action teams and personnel have suffered a number of direct attacks, including hijackings, thefts and kidnappings. UNMACA continues to monitor the security situation and adjust operations to ensure security of personnel and assets.

Funding for the program is unstable, with confirmed resources for humanitarian mine action identified only through the end of 2006, and a remaining shortfall of US\$1.7 million before full support of the existing capacity can be achieved. Additional funding for 2007 will be critical to enable continued operations and assist in the transition to full government responsibility, a process that has been hampered recently by changes in government personnel.

Lebanon—Rapid Response. The 34 days of hostilities between Israel and armed elements based in Lebanon resulted in extensive unexploded-ordnance contamination in southern Lebanon, mainly in the form of unexploded cluster bomblets and submunitions, with more limited contamination in other parts of the country. The U.N. Mine Action Team invoked the Inter-agency Rapid Response Plan to support Lebanese authorities (namely the National Demining Office) in addressing clearance and mine-risk-education needs, supporting humanitarian agencies and deploying an expanded United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon.

A Mine Action Planning Group, including U.N. agencies and implementing partners, was formed and convened meetings on July 27 and August 9. In addition to holding

a donor meeting at UNMAS on August 10, the Mine Action Team utilized the Mine Action Support Group network to issue letters updating donors on the scope of the problem, the operational response and funding requirements.

The National Demining Office, working in Beirut with a UNDP Technical Advisor and an UNMAS Coordination Officer and in coordination with the UNMAS-managed Mine Action Centre, South Lebanon, planned and prioritized the response. The National Mine Risk Education Steering Committee, with support from UNICEF, launched a mass-media awareness campaign for refugees in Syria and for people throughout Lebanon.

While the total amount of UXO in southern Lebanon is unknown, as of October 10, 2006, 770 individual cluster-bomb-strike sites have been identified. Reported casualties total 126, with 18 killed and 108 injured, mostly from cluster submunitions. Two of the dead and 38 of the injured were under the age of 18. The Lebanese Armed Forces, Mines Advisory Group, BACTEC International Limited and the Swedish Rescue Services Agency are undertaking clearance operations. Over 40,000 cluster bomblets and submunitions have been destroyed from September 1–28, 2006.² Additionally, the United Arab Emirates, which funded Operation Emirates Solidarity from 2002 to 2004 to clear Israeli minefields in southern Lebanon, has initiated OES 2, contracting BACTEC to clear the remaining pre-2000 minefields near Nabatiya and ArmorGroup to address a large number of the cluster-strike sites.

Donor response has been very encouraging and UNMAS would like to extend sincere thanks on behalf of the Mine Action Team to all donors who were in a position to contribute. As of September 30, UNMAS

reported \$15 million in confirmed and unconfirmed pledges through the Voluntary Trust Fund, which does not include funding for OES 2 and other bilateral contributions. The U.N. Mine Action Team will continue to update donors on resource requirements, which are evolving as the full scope of the problem becomes clear.

Update from UNDP

Iraq. The Victim Surveillance and Victim Assistance Workshop was held August 27–31, jointly organized by the National Mine Action Authority of Iraq, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The event facilitated policy coordination among NMAA and key ministries with a view to increasing responsiveness and effectiveness of VS/VA. A major output of the event was a Plan of Action that responsible governmental authorities will monitor.

The Iraqi Landmine Impact Survey is complete, covering 13 of the 18 governorates. Landmines or unexploded ordnance contaminate 2,117 communities or about 17 percent of the total visited; the majority of the contaminated communities are blocked from the productive use of their land. The surveyors documented 577 recent victims and thousands of older ones. More than 2.7 million persons live in these contaminated and impacted communities.

Under the field supervision of Danish Demining Group, 10 national explosive-ordnance-disposal teams improved the safety of more than 300 farming families and made more than 24,100,000 square meters (5,955 acres) available for agricultural use in the Basra region. This was accomplished through the disposal of more than 50,000 explosive items along with the clearance of 24,214,696 square meters (5,984 acres) from May 2005 until the end of July 2006.

Key objectives include:

- Making the institutional capacity of NMAA fully functional through its restructuring, policy advisory and technical support
- Further improving the management, coordination and technical capacity of Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Centre and General Directorate of Mine Action
- Continuing to lobby for Iraq to sign the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention⁴

Key challenges included the deteriorating security situation in central and southern Iraq.

These achievements have been realized through financial support from the European Commission and the governments of Italy and Japan. For 2007, the governments of Greece and South Korea will provide additional support through the Iraqi Trust Fund for the development of a functional national nongovernmental organization. The U.S. Department of State will support the UNDP Policy and Technical Advisor for the NMAA for 2007.

Additional funds are needed for developing a National Victim Surveillance and Assistance structure (some \$2 million), equipping and training retired soldiers for demining (\$12 million), and developing functional regional mine-action centers (some \$1 million).

Lebanon. National in-kind contribution for mine action remains at approximately \$4 million per year and national mine-clearance assets released approximately 20 million square meters (4,942 acres) of land as of September 30, 2006. Since cessation of hostilities, over 40,000 pieces of UXO have been cleared.

The key objective for Lebanon is to clear all areas affected by the 2006 conflict by December 2007.

There is a pressing need to ensure that the Lebanese endstate strategy, medium- and long-term plans, and annual mine-action plans are developed and linked with the wider national rehabilitation,

reconstruction and socioeconomic development plan. In order to accomplish this goal, the following must be attained:

- Support for a program that will be nationally owned and executed with a focus on management capability and planning, including a phased exit strategy for U.N. and other technical assistance.
- Project cost-effectiveness, achieved in part by categorizing and bringing together related functions to better track and effectively manage these costs. Cost-effectiveness will also be partially achieved through the national Technical Survey and institutional enhancement planned by the National Demining Office.
- Focus on management and coordination capacity of the National Demining Office and the International Support Group to integrate mine action with other sectors and to generate resources.

Key challenges included the eruption of conflict in July 2006 in Lebanon, which has escalated the mine problem. At the time of writing, the number of UXO items was not yet fully estimated. UXO has caused more victims in the first six weeks after the cessation of hostilities (August 14, 2006) than in the previous four years combined. Mine clearance in Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon has been placed on hold while national assets have been diverted to undertake clearance in southern Lebanon.

The funding situation in Lebanon is as follows:

- Explosives and explosive accessories are in short supply due to their rapid use during the UXO-clearance campaign.
- \$800,000 is needed for the capacity-building program to create a fully national mine-action structure by the end of 2007.
- Funding for mine clearance outside of southern Lebanon and for UXO clearance remains low.

Colombia. Key achievements in Colombia were as follows:

- The donation of prostheses to mine victims who attended the mine victims' regional meeting in Meta.
- A number of income-generating projects in need of "seed capital" targeted mine victims in Meta.
- Community leaders and municipal focal points for *Acción Integral Contra las Minas Antipersonal* identified and attended capacity-building workshops in Montes de María within the joint UNICEF-UNDP project.
- The Departmental Mine Victim Association was given legal status.
- Training and follow-up took place with municipal focal points for AICMA within the project with the governments of Antioquia and 24 municipalities.
- At the national level, reform of the VA legislation is ongoing.

Key challenges include:

- Ensuring the sustainability of mine action at regional and local levels.
- Strengthening mine victims' medical assistance at the emergency level and in long-term assistance.

Key objectives include:

- Strengthening the Mine Action Team of *Montes de María* by assigning a person responsible for mine action in the region.
- Evaluating actions carried out in all three regions during 2006.
- Developing annual mine-action plans for 2007–2008 in all three regions.

Update from UNICEF

Cambodia. In Cambodia, UNICEF continues to provide financial and technical support to national mine-risk-education coordination, community-based mine-risk reduction, as well as

mass-media and in-school MRE for children's projects. UNICEF also provides prostheses, wheelchairs, other mobility devices, and other assistance to children and women victims of landmines/UXO and other disabilities.

From July–August 2006, 57 casualties were reported by the Cambodian Mine/UXO Victim Information System. Of these, 41 were men, 13 were children under 18 years old and three were women. Thirty-three people were injured or killed by UXO and 24 from mines. Fifty-two of the total casualties had previously received MRE.

The National MRE Working Group has developed two sets of posters showing all risk activities related to UXO, and all MRE instructors have changed their approach from educating affected communities in general to more targeted clients, especially for those who work every day in the suspected mine/UXO areas and those who are scrap-metal collectors. In addition, all MRE teams have been trained on how to remove and destroy community-identified items immediately after they are reported.

Colombia. UNICEF continues to provide support to the *Observatorio Nacional de Minas Antipersonal* and to implementing agencies involved in MRE and landmine victim assistance in Colombia, focusing on the development of activities as outlined in the National Mine Action Plan 2004–2009.

UNICEF continues to support the decentralization process and the 18 departmental committees for mine action already established. UNICEF also advocates for the development of the remaining 11 departmental committees in order to complete the process of decentralization. Each of the 18 departmental committees has established its own action plan and budget, and UNICEF has provided technical assistance in both the design and implementation of the localized plans through ongoing advocacy, MRE and attention to victims, participating in meetings, sharing methodologies and materials, and project activities. UNICEF has provided funding for institutional capacity-building activities. The money was for the departments of Antioquia and Cauca and was provided through agreements with the departmental governments.

UNICEF continues to support the national nongovernmental organization *Paz y Democracia* and its work across 36 municipalities in mine action for communities, public workers, health and other community institutions. Included in the sessions was general awareness of generic mine-action issues and, more specifically, MRE.

UNICEF continues to provide technical support to the *Centro Integral de Rehabilitación de Colombia, Paz y Democracia* and the Departmental Committee for Mine Action of Antioquia in the development of new MRE materials for use with different population groups. UNICEF is currently conducting field tests of a facilitator's guidebook for MRE with community facilitators and affected communities, which it hopes to have finalized in the coming months. This guide will be used with a package of other instructional materials to assist in decentralizing MRE activities to the departmental level, training local promoters to manage relevant information and working with communities to develop practical so-

lutions to live safely in a mined environment.

Through a cooperation agreement with *Agencia Suiza para el Desarrollo y la Cooperación* (COSUDE), the Swiss Development Corporation and the *Observatorio Nacional de Minas Antipersonal*, UNICEF is supporting two institutions, *Centro Integral de Rehabilitación de Colombia* (CIREC) and Handicap International–Belgium, in the departments of Bolívar, Sucre and Antioquia to provide integrated physical and psychosocial rehabilitation for a total of 265 people with disabilities, including 65 mine victims identified as of September 30, 2006.

UNICEF has completed the translation of the International Mine Action Standards Best Practice Guidelines into Spanish and intends to develop curricula and training programs based on them in late 2006. A pilot project for teacher training, led by UNICEF, is currently being developed for the department of Antioquia with a range of partners.

UNICEF led the process of developing the Mine Action Portfolio for Colombia, which was completed in September, coordinating partners in the creation of 22 projects complementary to the national mine-action plan. UNICEF Colombia invited donors and other interested parties to a side meeting at the Seventh Meeting of State Parties⁵ where the government of Colombia presented the national plan for mine action and ongoing programming and gaps. UNICEF made a presentation on its role and support as well.

The UNICEF Colombia Mine Action Programme is currently supported by contributions from the governments of Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK Department for International Development.

Iraq. Following the recommendation of the MRE Coordination Meeting organized by UNICEF in February 2006, UNDP, UNICEF and WHO sponsored a five-day workshop August 27–31, 2006 on "Victim Surveillance and Assistance Strategy Development for Iraq" in collaboration with the National Mine Action Authority. Approximately 30 participants from the government (representing both north and south), local and international nongovernmental organizations, survivors, and U.N. agencies participated in the workshop. This was the first workshop of its kind to address the issues of establishing a victim surveillance system for mine/UXO victims and assistance to victims/survivors in Iraq.

Victim assistance is a pillar of mine action that has been neglected in post-war Iraq. There is a lack of systematic data collection and a national database to provide required information to stakeholders and service providers for assistance to victims and survivors. The workshop concluded with a plan of action for integrating landmine/UXO surveillance into the national injury surveillance system in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the NMAA. The participants of the workshop also agreed to pilot the surveillance system in three governorates, two from the south and one from the north. This pilot is expected to start in early 2007.

With regard to victim assistance, the workshop discussed five main areas: emergency and existing medical care; physical rehabilitation; psychological support; social and economic reintegration; and laws and policies. A plan of action was developed for 2006–2009, which focused on these areas. The participants of the workshop also agreed to form a Coordination and Consultative Committee led by the NMAA in coordination with the Ministry of Health and the Iraq Medical Association. It will include representation of other relevant ministries and nongovernmental organizations and will prepare a basic framework for assistance leading to a comprehensive victim-assistance strategy for Iraq and coordination with all the stakeholders.

UNICEF also supported a summer-school program for MRE in six highly and moderately contaminated villages in Sulaymaniyah (Kurdistan region). This two-month project (July–August 2006) targeted primary-school children and shepherds in the six villages. The project delivered MRE through a participatory approach, including music, drama, story writing and English classes. Almost 300 children benefited from this activity. The main goal of the project was to prevent injuries during the summer holidays by engaging children in recreational activities and educating them about safe behavior and landmine/UXO risks. Sulaymaniyah has the highest number of contaminated villages (582, according to the recent ILIS report) and the highest number of recent victims among the northern governorates.

The majority of the victims are between 14 and 49 years old, and most of them were herding when the accident happened. Out of 582 contaminated communities, 41 percent have primary schools in the vicinity of contaminated areas, indicating that children are still at risk of landmines and UXO. The project was implemented by the General Directorate of Mine Action, which is the regional mine-action center for Sulaymaniyah governorate.

Lao PDR. UNICEF has been working closely with Mines Advisory Group since June 2006 to conduct a UXO risk-assessment study. A stakeholders meeting was organized at the end of September to discuss the findings and recommendations.

In total, 1,312 adults completed a Knowledge Attitude Practice questionnaire, of which 54 percent were men and 46 percent were women. UNICEF and MAG selected a research team to have focus-group discussions with 14 groups of men and 12 groups of women. A total of 720 children over eight years of age completed the KAP questionnaire (495 boys and 225 girls), and the research team held 18 focus-group discussions with children, using UNICEF ethical guidelines.

The study distinguished between intentional (i.e., voluntary) exposure to live ordnance, in which actors aware of the risk purposefully exposed themselves to live

ordnance, and unintentional (involuntary) exposure. While some of the prevention activities may be the same, intentionality is an important variable and particularly relevant in Laos, where UXO injury due to intentional exposure to live ordnance (for example, through the deliberate tampering of ordnance for the scrap-metal trade) is increasing. The assessment found a generally high level of UXO awareness and knowledge of risk-taking and risk-reduction behaviors; however, the assessment also found that many people, including women and children, continue to voluntarily interact with live, or potentially live, ordnance on an almost daily basis.

The findings from the study will be used in close collaboration with the recently established UXO National Regulatory Authority to inform MRE strategy development as well as the development of new messages for at-risk populations—especially children—who are attracted to scrap-metal collection. The UXO Needs Assessment data provides a unique opportunity to assist the government in taking the next strategic steps to develop appropriate messages and responses that more effectively target areas and people.

Upcoming activities include a four-day UXO Risk Education Strategy Planning Workshop to be conducted by staff from the Geneva International Centre for

Humanitarian Demining, UNICEF and the Lao Youth Union. In addition, finalization of the UXO Risk Assessment as well as translation of the IMAS Best Practice Guidelines will continue. UNICEF will also give support to the Community Awareness Technical Working Group of the NRA for the first technical working group meeting. The UNICEF office is seeking new funding to expand support in its collaboration with the UXO NRA and the development of new risk-reduction strategies. ♦

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