

Mine Action

Support Group Update

Excerpted from the October 2005 MASG Newsletter

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.

Developments in UNMAS-managed Programs

Afghanistan. Field operations were maintained throughout October 2005 for most of the country, as was continued work with the government of Afghanistan on the issue of transition, including internal analysis and planning. Ongoing capacity building continued in areas including administration and finance. Some operations were suspended for a short time during the election process in late September, but these were resumed immediately after its conclusion. A number of attacks on mine action personnel occurred, including a direct targeting of HALO Trust personnel working on munitions destruction in the southwest. Several HALO personnel were killed during a separate traffic accident on their way to work near Bagram.

Cyprus. The clearance program in the buffer zone continued, with additional funding from the European Union that will carry the program into 2006. Turkey's agreement to the demining program had allowed Phase II of the program focusing on minefields of Turkish and unknown origin in the buffer zone to commence with clearance teams operating in three Turkish minefields. In October, the teams completed clearance of two of those minefields. Since the start of Phase II operations, 57,296 square meters (14 acres) of land have been cleared and handed over.

Eritrea/Ethiopia. In October, the Eritrean government banned the U.N. Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea from flying helicopters in Eritrean airspace. This ban led to mine clearance operations being suspended due to a lack of adequate casualty evacuation coverage. Survey, marking, mine risk education and training activities continued. The suspension of UNMEE demining brought to a halt the only demining occurring in Eritrea, as the national program was suspended in April due to the government's confiscation of mine action program vehicles and a subsequent request by the Eritrean Demining Authority for UNDP to terminate the contracts of most UNDP technical advisors. Prior to the ban on helicopter flights in Eritrea, on Oct. 1, 2005, a civilian bus in Sector West hit a newly laid anti-tank mine. One passenger was killed, and 19 others were injured. After conducting an investigation into the accident, the Mine Action Coordination Centre instructed the route clearance contractor to conduct checks on all roads in the area, just prior to the suspension of operations. The MACC also issued a revised mine/UXO threat assessment for the mission area, as well as a new travel advisory.

Sudan. On Oct. 31, 2005, a *Fondation Suisse de Déminage* mine clearance team working with the World Food Program's road reconstruction and rehabilitation program was ambushed on Juba-Nimule road in southern Sudan, resulting in the deaths of two FSD colleagues (one international, one national staff) and injuries to two Sudanese soldiers. The United Nations has suspended all operations around the area and is evaluating the security situation. The U.N. Mine Action Office concluded a pre-deployment visit to the Kenyan military demining company to be sent to Wau, allowing the company to conduct manual demining activities in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards and granting immediate deployment. UNMAO conducted a training visit for the Egyptian military company to be deployed to Kadugli, and the company was successfully trained and accredited according to IMAS.

Update from UNDP

Angola. UNDP hosted a preparatory assistance mission to provide support to the governmental operator INAD (National Demining Institute for Angola). After two rounds of consultation, a three-year project was proposed, formulated with technical assistance at the headquarters and training school to obtain increased management and technical capacity of INAD; an enhanced, updated training school; and training and equipment for seven INAD demining brigades. Operations have been suspended since May on the Landmine Impact Survey due to a lack of funding from the Survey Action Center. The National Commission Governing Mine Action has since assumed responsibility for the ongoing management and completion of the LIS in consultation with SAC. Eleven of 18 provinces have now been completed. Three further provinces were scheduled to be completed by 2005 year-end and a project to complete two further provinces by October 2006 has just started.

Chad. Two High Commission for National Demining mine risk education teams carried out MRE activities in the north (Faya Largeau and Fada) and in the refugee camps in the east. Operations in Fada finally started after being postponed for one month due to financial difficulties and a mine accident in September. A key challenge is the post of adviser in information systems and technology and databases remains vacant, and this position

is of strategic importance now that the results of the Technical Survey are available and the Mines Advisory Group, U.S. Department of State program is generating significant data. The government of Chad is expected to honor its funding commitments; however, additional external funding is still required to pursue operations in Fada and the development of victim assistance plans.

Mauritania. In 2004, Mauritania destroyed its last stockpile of 5,000 anti-personnel mines and has retained 728 AP mines for training purposes. The Information Management System for Mine Action has been installed in the National Humanitarian Demining Office to record information on mine victims and minefields that have been cleared. UNICEF has been implementing an MRE project in partnership with the National Humanitarian Demining Office and national non-governmental organizations, with activities including a knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) survey, minefield marking, and training of 100 community-based organizations. In accordance with Mauritania's National Completion Plan and the Ottawa Convention,¹ the overall objective for the mine action program is for Mauritania to be mine-free² by 2011. An assessment revealed an absence of real demining or MRE activities and a lack of national mine action capacity. To enable Mauritania to achieve the objectives of its completion plan, an investment of \$4,15 million (U.S.) is required between 2006 and 2010, including \$1.6 million in 2006.

Tajikistan. On the Tajik-Afghan border and in central areas of Tajikistan, 89,949 square meters (22 acres) of land have been manually cleared. Since the beginning of the program in 2003, the total amount of cleared area is 144,386 square meters (36 acres), but about 25 million square meters (about 10 square miles) remain to be cleared. Survey operations reveal 27 mined areas on the border. UNDP's Mine Action Completion Project begins in 2006, and it will aim to assist Tajikistan in meeting its Ottawa obligations by making the country mine-safe before 2010. Although there is no liaison between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan regarding landmine issues and mine action is still not permitted from the Tajik side of the border, a recent press report stated that Uzbekistan has begun clearing its landmines from the Tajik-Uzbek border. Observation from the Tajik Border Committee reports no evidence of such mine clearance thus far. Tajik Mine Action Cell observers will seek to confirm whether or not there is any local knowledge regarding Uzbek mine clearance. TMAC faces a serious funding shortfall and full funding was required by Jan. 1, 2006, to prevent an interruption in the program.

Uganda. Two clearance teams are starting operations in western Uganda (Kasese district). Forty police officers are undergoing a humanitarian demining training program sponsored by the United Kingdom at the International Mine Action Training Centre in Nairobi, Kenya. In early 2006, combined clearance teams will begin operations in areas of northern Uganda affected by mines and explosive remnants of war. Needs assessments will be conducted in two northern districts (Lira and Soroti). A key challenge is ongoing insurgent activity in parts of northern and northeastern Uganda, which is endangering MRE, victim assistance activities and clearance operations, as well as the timely return/resettlement of internally displaced persons. An additional \$750,000 is needed to make six survey/clearance/battle area teams fully operational in Kasese and in northern districts. If funding needs are not met by December 2005, the clearance operations could be delayed, which might result in the delayed return and resettlement of IDPs in northern Uganda.

Update from UNICEF

Afghanistan. UNICEF is the coordinating agency of MRE for the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan and under the umbrella of the U.N. Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan and the government of Afghanistan. Standardization of MRE activities throughout the country began in 2002, and new MAPA training methodologies for community-based MRE activities have included peer education activities, police training and direct implementation of MRE in IDP camps and at border crossing points and encashment centers. MRE activities have been integrated into Ministry of Education teacher training programs that have trained and provided materials for some 63,000 formal and informal primary school teachers. A self-advocacy and rights awareness training program for landmine survivors and people with disabilities was piloted in early 2005 to over 180 people. Due to the demand for additional training opportunities, this program has been expanded to four other regions and hopes to target at least 400 people in 15 provinces.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to provide technical, financial and logistical support to the BiH Mine Action Centre and other organizations. BHMACE recently ran an MRE management course for 25 participants to apply MRE planning at the community level, conducted MRE presentations for U.N. security staff in five municipalities and held a coordination meeting regarding the transfer of the International Committee of the Red Cross Mine Victim Database to BHMACE. UNICEF supported the local NGO Genesis

Project in conducting 120 workshops on topics of MRE integration for teachers and peer educators. Italian NGO INTERSOS conducted MRE training courses for local civil protection departments, community representatives and security managers of private and public companies, aimed at improved implementation of simple educational campaigns for endangered groups in rural areas. Local NGO Anti-Mine Initiative began implementing a project to develop 15 MRE plans for communities. The current financial situation of the UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Program is of serious concern as no funding is available for 2006. UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently requires \$800,000 for 2006.

Cambodia. In August 2005, the Cambodia Mine/UXO Victim Information System reported 36 new casualties. This shows a decrease of 27 percent compared to the 49 casualties reported in August 2004. Of the 36 casualties, 75 percent were men, 23 percent were children under 18 years of age and 2 percent were women. UXO injured or killed 42 percent of the casualties, while the other 58 percent were mine casualties. Thirty-four percent of the victims were injured or killed while tampering with UXO and 19 percent were injured or killed while farming. For the last 12 months, the number of casualties totaled 905. UNICEF provides financial and technical support for national MRE coordination through the Cambodian Mine Action/Victim Assistance Authority and community-based mine risk reduction, mass media and school MRE campaigns. Prostheses, wheelchairs and assistance for rehabilitation to children and women victims of landmines/UXO continued.

Russian Federation. According to information UNICEF gathered in each district of Chechnya, no new mine/UXO-related incidents involving civilians were reported in August. Since 1995, UNICEF has recorded 3,031 mine/UXO civilian victims (2,340 wounded and 641 killed), including 737 children (612 wounded and 125 killed). Meanwhile, UNICEF and its partner organizations have continued to disseminate MRE messages. Some 450 children from Grozny secondary schools participated in MRE drama presentations/groups. The Republican Clinical Hospital completed the treatment of 27 mine/UXO-affected children. Additional medical equipment has been provided, improving the quality of services. UNICEF's recent monitoring mission to Grozny assessed the need for additional training for medical staff. Meanwhile, some 18 mine/UXO-affected children started school with new prosthetic appliances provided by Grozny's Prosthetic Workshop.

Sri Lanka. The third quarter of the year is traditionally the most dangerous period in Sri Lanka for landmine/UXO injuries as people return to their fields to begin planting and harvesting their crops. To raise awareness of the dangers, the first weeks of July and August have been designated National Mine Action Weeks across Sri Lanka. This year, demining and survivor assistance NGOs participated actively in the national event. Local and international media covered the Mine Action Weeks; the press release developed by UNICEF got wide coverage as an Associated Press story and was repeated in many national and international papers and Web sources. UNICEF staff has also trained quality assurance inspectors in MRE for an ongoing external monitoring capacity.

Sudan. In September, UNICEF signed project agreements with two local NGOs to deliver MRE to IDPs in four camps and four squatter areas in Khartoum. Through these projects, 300,000 IDPs who plan to return to mine/UXO-affected areas in the southern and central regions of Sudan will receive MRE in current host locations, as well as while en route

when passing through a major U.N. way station set up in the Kosti area. UNICEF also supported Save the Children-U.S., along with three local NGOs, the Ministry of Education and local radio in South Kordofan state in the Nuba Mountains, to implement a community-based MRE project. UNICEF designed two posters, one leaflet and one mine/UXO fact sheet for MRE to be produced for distribution among at-risk groups. New MRE road signboards were designed for use along a recently cleared road in south Sudan.

Tajikistan. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, held a six-day workshop on MRE for the representatives of Rasht, Tavildara, Vanj and Darvoz districts. The purpose was to offer a specialization in MRE to teachers, representatives of district education departments and representatives of youth committees from areas contaminated by mines or other ERW. An extensive flip chart has been designed to help educators transmit knowledge about the risks of mines and other ERW and to teach the ways to minimize these risks in Tajikistan. An MRE manual has been designed for teachers and translated into Tajik to be used in conjunction with the MRE flip chart.

The full text of the MASG Newsletter as well as previous and subsequent issues are available at http://www.eda.admin.ch/newyork_miss/e/home/masg.html.

See "References and Endnotes," page 108

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Endnotes

1. *“Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.”* Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997.
http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Oct. 10, 2005.
2. Editor’s Note: Some countries and mine action organizations are urging the use of the term “mine free,” while others are espousing the term “mine safe” or “impact free.” “Mine free” connotes a condition where all landmines have been cleared, whereas the terms “mine safe” and “impact free” refer to the condition in which landmines no longer pose a credible threat to a community or country.