

Notes from United Nations Mine Action Service

United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) serves as the focal point for all U.N. mine-related activities. During the past six months, UNMAS supported many mine action programs throughout the world.

by Sarah Taylor, MAIC

Introduction

At the center of all U.N. mine-related activities, carried out by 11 departments and agencies located within the organization, is the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS). UNMAS thus serves to ensure that responsibilities within the U.N. mine-related activities and efforts are evenly distributed and not duplicated. Other responsibilities of UNMAS include: mine action policy development and coordination, assessment and monitoring of the global landmine threat, information management, mine action program initiation and support, quality management and technology issues, advocacy and consciousness-raising and resource mobilization.

Operations

Over the past six months UNMAS supported many mine action programs throughout the world. Particularly, UNMAS focused its support on Ethiopia/Eritrea, Southern Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Kosovo.

Ethiopia/Eritrea: Danish Church Aid, with the assistance of the United Nations, completed the training of 120 Eritrean mine clearance personnel from the Eritrean Demining Agency; 60 are now deployed and operating. In addition, UNMEE (United Nations Mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea) Mine Action Coordination Center (MACC) was informed of the possibility of 650 demobilized Eritrean soldiers being made available for mine clearance training, and UNMAS (Prudhomme) visited UNMEE to provide support to the MACC in the development of a strategy for future mine action operations. UNMAS (Morete), along with the Survey Action Center, also recently conducted an advance survey mission to Eritrea. Finally, the Chief of UNMAS and the Program Officer for Ethiopia/Eritrea recently visited the area.

Southern Lebanon: In April the Chief of UNMAS met with Mr. De Mistura, the PRSG, to discuss UN support of the organization for the "International High Level Workshop for Demining Lebanon" that took place May 21-22,

2001. In addition, the National Demining Office announced their intention to establish a "Southern Coordination Center" in the south, possibly located in Tyre. Finally, A Memorandum of Understanding between the government of Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is being prepared to facilitate effective implementation of mine-action activities in the South, utilizing the UAE's \$50 million (U.S.) contribution.

Sri Lanka: UNMAS (Marstein) recently conducted a technical mission to Sri Lanka to determine the current situation in the country in relation to mine action.

Kosovo: The first fatality since the commencement of the mine action program in Kosovo occurred when a humanitarian mine clearance worker was killed while conducting clearance tasks; three non-fatal accidents to clearance personnel occurred during June 2001. Investigations into the causes surrounding the accidents and the subsequent lessons to be learned are ongoing. In addition, the UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) MACC completed the accreditation of all in-country mine and UXO clearance organizations and mine awareness entities. UNMIK also continued to make progress towards the attainment of stated clearance objectives by the end of 2001. Clearance of known mine fields stands at 80 percent, with a further eight percent of mined areas currently under clearance. Discussions were also recently held with the Departments for Health and Social Welfare and Education and Science regarding their long-term roles in mine victim assistance and mine awareness, respectively.

Program Initiation and Support

UNMAS' essential responsibilities are developing policies and programs and then following them up with support. In recent months, UNMAS has played an integral part in the development and support of numerous demining programs throughout the world.

Development: Representatives of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group - Mine Action recently met for an all-day retreat to commence the development of a three to five year strategy for UN mine action. UNMAS has also continued drafting a mine action rapid deployment plan.

A concept paper to this effect was distributed in support of the Steering Committee on Mine Action that took place in Geneva on May 3, 2001. In addition, UNMAS (Morete) recently visited the United Nations and other partners to develop the UN mine action emergency response plan. Meetings occurred with OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), GICHD (Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining), WFP (World Food Program—Rome), the UN Humanitarian Response Depot and the UN Logistics Base (Brindisi). Also, UN agencies, NGOs, IOs and donors met to discuss the development of a five-year strategy for UN mine action; a first draft document was distributed on June 30th.

Support: UNMAS and other key UN agencies briefed a special meeting of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG) to provide an overview of the United Nation's role in mine action, and their partnership with donors and to encourage a clearer understanding of mine action policy and funding matters; two summary documents outlining key elements and issues were distributed. UNMAS also recently attended the first Outreach of the International Mine Action activity in Croatia and with the support of the Croatian Mine Action Center, in support of the roll out of new International Mine Action Standards.

Meetings and Visits: In April 2001 the UNMAS Chief and the Program Officer for the Survey and Standards visited representatives from the Canadian International Development Agency and Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, in Ottawa, to discuss proposed and ongoing projects. Also in April, UNMAS Chief and the Deputy Chief of Policy visited representatives of the U.S. State Department, various NGOs and the James Madison Mine Action Information Center to discuss projects and activities. The Chief of UNMAS also met with the Action Support Groups for LMMA and representatives of the UAE to discuss funding issues. In addition, UNMAS (Mulliner) attended the 3rd Outreach of the International Mine Action Standards, held in Maputo, Mozambique. Finally,

numerous meetings were attended by UNMAS, and UNMAS also received many visitors in the month of June. For example, UNMAS attended the Demining Technology Workshop in Canada, Understanding the APM Ban Treaty in Poland, the Aid and Trade Conference and the UNICEF Mine Awareness Retreat. Among the visitors to UNMAS were the Mineseeeker Foundation, the Program Manager of UNMIK MACC, the Project Director of GICHD International Management System for Mine Action, the Senegalese Government delegation and the Cranfield University Mine Action Group.

Resource Mobilization

Voluntary donor contributions are the most important facet of U.N. mine action funding. Thus, UNMAS manages the U.N. system's resource mobility and the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) for Assistance in Mine Action. Between April and June, VTF received numerous funds and pledges. In April, funds that VTF received included: \$239,197 (U.S.) from Denmark to go to Ethiopia/Eritrea, \$614,205 from the United Kingdom to go to the HG Coordination, \$57,490 from Canada to go to Cambodia and \$124,750 un-earmarked from Australia. In addition, UNMAS received the following pledges: \$49,000 from Sweden to go to Yemen and \$444,000 un-earmarked from Sweden. In June VTF received numerous funds from Canada, including \$127,890 to go to Southern Lebanon and \$1,177,994 to go to Kosovo. ■

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