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MASG MASG

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An Update on the Mine Action Support Group

The following article highlights the recent activities of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG). This includes updates on the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

UNMAS Updates

Policy, Resource Mobilization and Information

The most significant recent policy development is the General Assembly’s adoption of its new Resolution on Assistance in Mine Action. This resolution reaffirms the particular role of the United Nations in mine action coordination and calls for a formal review of UNMAS's five-year strategy in 2003. Additionally, the UN victim assistance policy is in its final stages of development. The draft policy was scheduled to be circulated by the end of January 2003, after final internal revisions.

Since November 2002, additional pledges within the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action (VTF) have been received from Denmark, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. The funds received in the VTF for 2002 totaled $24.2 million (U.S.), which came from 16 donor countries. This is more than twice the amount contributed in 2001.

The first Workshop on Landmine and UXO Safety Training was held in Tehran on January 7–8, 2003. Representatives from the government, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and oil companies attended the workshop, which was organized by UNDP Iran. A series of landmine and UXO safety training workshops will be held in 11 mine-affected countries over the course of 2003.

Afghanistan

Key staff from the Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA) visited New York from January 6–11, 2003, for discussions with representatives of UN agencies. One result of this meeting was the decision to conduct a seminar in Kabul in March to produce supporting plans for implementing the multi-year strategy formulated in late 2002. The funding of operations for 2003 remains at a critical level, with approximately $20 million of outstanding pledges from various donors still to be deposited to support activities in the field.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), commercial mine clearance company MECHEM has recently completed a technical survey in Kindu airport to facilitate further deployment of the United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC). Funding will only support part of the MACC core costs until the end of June 2003, and an additional $200,000 is required to continue these efforts. Furthermore, there is still an urgent need to deploy a core mobile emergency mine/UXO clearance capacity to respond to humanitarian requirements, which is estimated to cost $670,000 for a six-month period.

Eritrea

Plans continue for the demining work in support of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC), including manual clearance, use of mine dogs and quality assurance (QA). A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the United Nations and the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) has been drafted, and a formal request for assistance is being presented by the EEBC. The Mine Action Coordination Center’s (MACC’s) revised Work Plan, following the Presidential Decree, has now been formally approved by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Working in close cooperation with the Macedonian Mine Action Center, the Mine Action Office (MAO) is coordinating bilateral contributions to provide the national authorities with the full capacity to manage the mine/UXO problem. It is expected that by mid-2003 the Macedonian Mine Action Center will have the capacity to cope with the residual problem, when training of national staff and development of national standards are completed with the technical assistance of the United Nations. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has recently investigated WWII UXO and is considering funding clearance activities.

Southern Lebanon

As of December 2002, “Operation Emirates Solidarity” (OES)—funded by the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—had allowed for more than 21,300 AP mines to be destroyed and over 2,500,000 square meters of land to be cleared and handed over to communities. It is now anticipated that OES will be completed by mid-2003, but efforts are underway to persuade the UAE to allow remaining funds to extend OES and expanding operations north of the Litani River. The UAE agreed to provide some support to the operation of the MACC, to cover the incremental costs related to the OES initiative, in particular those related to QA activities. Current funding for QA will only cover part of the core costs of the MACC through June 2003; an additional $400,000 is necessary to fully support the MACC in this effort.
Sudan

Preliminary planning for mine assessment and clearance is in an advanced stage and funding is required. Preliminary technical and operational liaison team has been established and $1,894,000 is now required to open a key logistic route. The explosive detection dog (EDD) evaluation/acadcreditation area in Kadugli is complete. A small team of Kosovo Albanian deminers has been temporarily deployed to establish the EDD teams to train them. A small team of personnel are being selected and trained. Danish Church Aid (DCA) was successfully accredited as a mine/UXO clearance organization and licensed to conduct operations on January 9, 2003.

UNDP Updates

Albania

Demining activities in Albanian were wound down during the end of December 2002. A planning group met on November 28, 2002, to review the current strategy and make plans for 2003. The following are the developments for 2003:

• Complete the impact surveys in and around Peshis, where the Albanian border meets the Montenegn border, by June 2003. This will conclude the MRE surveys started in 2002.

• Complete the technical surveys by November 2003, which will release an estimated six million square meters of land.

• Clear an additional 500,000 square meters of land.

Demining activities will resume in March 2003, beginning with a refresher training course. Clearance activities for 2003 will require $5.42 million.

Ethiopia

In December 2002, the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) deployed two newly trained civilian demining companies to conduct survey, marking, clearance and mine risk education (MRE) activities in support of the Emergency Mine Recovery Project (EMRP), which is funded by the World Bank. EMAO is currently finalising its contract with the World Bank for 2003. The funding will support the four demining companies that currently work in the country and enable EMAO to field rapid response teams and establish a national QA capability.

Also in December, the United Nations and the government of Ethiopia launched an appeal for assistance in dealing with a major humanitarian crisis facing Ethiopia: the ongoing widespread drought. 20 percent of the population has been identified as being at risk of food and water shortages. The drought impacts mine action efforts because the displacement of the affected population in unfamiliar areas in search of water and grazing land increases their exposure to mines and UXO. The drought conditions also make it difficult for the government, NGOs and partners to effectively provide assistance.

The role of the UNDP is to train local representatives, such as mine action volunteers, in ineffective mine action response areas. The aim is to reduce the number of accidents and injuries and to increase capacity to deal with future mine action situations.
Group consisting of the government of Sudan, the Sudanese Red Crescent Society and two national NGOs. The terms of reference for a needs assessment and analysis have been developed. The assessment will analyze at-risk groups and their locations. It will help focus MRE activities and will also strengthen the capacity of local national research institutions and will commence in the Nuba Mountains, Juba and Kassala state. Work is ongoing to adapt IMSMA forms to the Sudan context and to translate them into Arabic.

*The above information was compiled from the January MASG Newsletter. Further details on the above projects can be found in the latest MASG newsletter, posted on www.mineaction.org under "Documents."