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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).

excerpted from recent MASG newsletters

UNMAS Updates

Policy, Treaty Implementation and Resource Mobilization

UNMAS convened the Sixth International Mine Action Programme Directors and UN Advisors meeting from March 17–20, 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland. Among the 130 participants were national directors as well as representatives from UNICEF field offices and from key UN system partners, international and regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The meeting included discussions of strategic planning and operational priority setting, integration of mine action into peacekeeping, humanitarian and development programming and budgeting, emerging policy issues, recent developments in mine action tools and technology, and field coordination among governments, the United Nations and NGOs.

UNMAS has continued to provide support to the ongoing Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). From March 10–14, 2003, the CCW-GGE met in Geneva. In accordance with the mandate given by States Parties in December 2002, the CCW-GGE started negotiations about a new instrument on explosive remnants of war (ERW) and continued discussion on mines other than AP mines.

The Information Unit contracted an NGO to integrate a donors' investment database into UNMAS's website, E-MINE. This development will make it easier for donors to post updates directly to the website and to locate investment data and chart trends. Reports from non-governmental and UN mine-action organizations to the donor and NGO communities through regular "Iraq Updates" are also being disseminated and published on E-MINE.

Afghanistan

The Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (MACA) hosted a Strategic Planning Workshop from March 2–10, 2003 in order to further develop the MACA Strategic Plan for the period 2002–2012. This workshop, which was facilitated by the Cranfield Mine Action team, included participants from the Afghan national NGOs, UN and Agency Headquarters in New York, local representation from UN organizations, the government of Afghanistan and the donor community.

Operational activities in southeastern Afghanistan were temporarily halted due to insecurity in the vicinity of Sarobi. An attack on an Afghan national mine action NGO vehicle by armed assailants resulted in the wounding of two national staff members. In other areas, operations continued as normal, with all NGOs functioning at maximum capacity. The transfer of all data from the old Mine Information System to the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) was completed on schedule.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The Mine Action Coordination Center (MACC) conducted mine risk assessments in support of the United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC) and other UN agencies, particularly in the Ituri Region, where it supervised the destruction of stockpiles by non-state actors (NSAs). Furthermore, there is still an urgent need to deploy a core mobile emergency mine/UXO clearance capacity to respond to humanitarian requirements. The cost of this capability is \$670,000 (U.S.) for a six-month period. This would meet the emergency situations that have been identified thus far. On April 26 at Komanda, one MONUC military observer was killed and another wounded in a landmine accident. A subsequent investigation confirmed that the area remains heavily mined, and the rest of the team was relocated to Bunia.

Federal Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)

Activities that had been suspended due to adverse weather conditions in January and February resumed in early March. It is expected that by mid-2003 the Macedonian Mine Action Centre will have the capacity to deal with the residual problem, when training of national staff and development of national standards will be completed with the technical assistance of the United Nations. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has recently conducted a reconnaissance into WWII UXO and is considering funding clearance activities.

Iraq

The Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq (HCI) has recently established a number of sector coordinators in sectors such as water and sanitation, food and nutrition; UNMAS is responsible for the Mine Action sector. The Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (IACG-MA) recently activated the UN Mine Action Rapid Response Plan and UNMAS has now established a Mine Action Coordination Team (MACT) that contains representatives from UNICEF, the World Food Program (WFP), the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) and a number of mine action NGOs. The MACT established an office in Basra on May 4, 2003.

The NGO Danish Church Aid (DCA) will provide an integrated mine clearance capacity in the south, which will be enhanced by additional agencies in the near future. This capacity will initially be used to clear munitions dumps in schools, mosques and other public places. UNMAS, through UNOPS, has also identified a mine clearance capacity that can be used to clear mines, UXO and ammunition dumps in other affected areas in Iraq, including Baghdad. To ensure that this capacity is deployed at the earliest possible opportunity, the assets initiated under the United Nations' Rapid Response Plan—four explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams and four mine detection dog (MDD) teams—were deployed and began work in mid-May.

Southern Lebanon

As of the end of April 2003, more than 3.8 million sq m of land had been cleared and handed over to communities. Additionally, 30,803 AP mines, 1509 AT mines and 1235 items of UXO have been destroyed since the start of operations in May 2002. Also in April, Mine Tech International completed the clearance of a major belt of AT mines in the Wazzani area close to the Blue Line. Phase II of Operation Emirates Solidarity (OES) has also proceeded well and at the time of writing was 11 months ahead of schedule.

Sudan

An agreement for a general ceasefire brought an immediate need for mine assessment and clearance. Under the terms of the Geneva Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the United Nations will help both parties develop a national mine action strategy that meets the immediate needs of the emergency humanitarian situation and plans ahead to post-conflict Sudan. A detailed plan will concentrate on the operational requirements.

Data is being entered into IMSMA in the Rumbek Mine Action Coordination Office (MACO) and will be limited to areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The Explosive Detection Dog (EDD) evaluation/accreditation area in Kadugli is now complete.

DCA was successfully accredited as a mine/UXO clearance organization and licensed to conduct operations on January 9, 2003. The organization has completed its logistic move from Eritrea to Sudan and is operational in the Nuba Mountains.

A small team of DCA Kosovo Albanian deminers was deployed temporarily to enable the EDD Teams to start work while local personnel were trained. The training was completed and the Kosovo Albanians have returned to the Balkans. A total of 20 deminers—10 from the government of Sudan (GoS) and 10 from the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M)—have been trained. DCA has also recently completed the clearance of the road from Al Hamra to UmSerdiba. This will allow greater freedom of movement within the region.

RONCO was successfully accredited as a mine/UXO clearance organization and licensed to conduct operations on February 15, 2003. Since then, the organization has been deployed in the Miri Hill region of the Nuba Mountains where they have primarily conducted route verification operations. The presence of RONCO in this area has promoted a sense of stability in this area, which has resulted in the return of many internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Clearance activity continues in the Nuba Mountains and over 15 families have now returned to their pre-war home locations as a direct result of mine clearance in the Miri Hills. Water facilities have been rehabilitated through UNICEF, and a WFP Food for Work program has led to the reconstruction and resettlement of the village of Farek al Kroup. The UNICEF-managed mine risk education (MRE) component of the program is about to embark on a comprehensive MRE needs assessment in the Nuba Mountains. The EDD Evaluation/Accreditation Area is currently being extended to provide more facilities to allow for comprehensive refresher training to be maintained throughout the clearance season.

The Foundation for Swiss Demining (FSD), along with the Technical Advisor (TA) in Rumbek South, conducted an assessment of the roads and railways in southern Sudan as part of the planned support to WFP. The aim of this assessment was to produce a proposal that would outline the prioritization and technical needs for high-impact route clearance following stabilization as a result of the peace process. The Rumbek TA also undertook an assessment of the Loki-Kapoeta road in conjunction with OLS Security and provided advice to the Chief of Security on Threat Assessment and subsequent Risk Management of the road to allow low-threat portions to be trafficked.

In El Hamra, DCA has cleared 1893 sq m along Um Sirdiba Road. The organization has completed its initial route clearance tasking and has successfully completed a joint training course. To date, RONCO has cleared 42,860 sq m in the Farek al Krup area of Miri Hills. RONCO's clearance efforts have so far enabled a hand pump and water well to be established in this area and have facilitated the return of over 15 families to their pre-war home area.

Eritrea

The MACC Information Section upgraded IMSMA for Eritrea to version 3.0. Two IMSMA experts from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHHD) visited the MACC to assist the Information Section with the installation of this new version, as well as to provide the staff with basic training on version 3.0. The MACC EOD Team conducted EOD operations in all three sectors including UXO disposal training to the Kenbatt EOD and Deminer Teams. All three national contingents are now working with the same international set of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and Technical and Safety Standards. This is a major achievement within UN-mandated mission programs.

Other Projects

Quality Assurance Monitoring (QAM) for the Somalia, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ethiopia Landmine Impact Surveys (LISs) began earlier this year. Additionally, proper actions were made for the Certification Committee to review the Cambodian LIS. Also, the results of the Review Board Meeting were presented to the Programme Directors and Technical Advisors meeting in Geneva where the launch of Edition 2 of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) took place.

UNDP Updates

Afghanistan

The second meeting of the Mine Action Working Group took place on April 24, 2003. This is an inter-sectoral forum established to help the 12 Consultative Groups focus on the ways

that mine and UXO contamination affect the sectors they address (i.e., transportation, agriculture, etc.).

Albania

Two international NGOs, the FSD and DCA-Action by Churches Together (ACT), began demining operations in April 2003. They plan on clearing at least 400,000 sq m of mine-affected land and to complete impact surveys of northeast Albania in 2003.

A broad, integrated victim assistance strategy has been adopted in Albania. The Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE) has secured a €2 million grant from the European Commission (EC) Integrated Border Management Programme to complete a technical survey of northeast Albania—along the Albania-Kosovo border—over a 21-month period. Six manual teams, two mine detection dog (MDD) teams and one mini-flail will conduct the technical survey. At the end of the survey, the technical survey organization will be converted into an Albanian demining organization, which will begin operations in 2005.

Azerbaijan

Five people were trained and certified as MRE Instructors, enhancing the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action's (ANAMA's) MRE capabilities. A U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) delegation visited ANAMA headquarters in April to discuss future testing of mechanical demining machines in Azerbaijan. ANAMA created a new field-testing site in Horadiz, Fizuli District, for MDD training and accreditation, including four recently delivered MDDs from RONCO.

Eritrea

The General Manager for the Eritrean Demining Authority has signed a commitment to comply with IMAS and UN oversight of equipment and funds. The LIS is progressing well; however, there is a shortfall of \$330,000 in funding for the survey project.

The Eritrea LIS completed training of enumerators and Expert Opinion Collection at the *Zoba* (province) and *sub-Zoba* (district) levels. Operations began out of the LIS office in Asmara with senior staff conducting surveys with the newly trained enumerators. Teams were deployed to the field in three districts on March 14, 2003. To date, almost 100 of 1,655 suspected communities have been visited.

The UNDP Victim Assistance Capacity Building Project in Support of the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare is developing a national rehabilitation plan, which will include, among others, some or all of the following projects:

- National survey for people with disabilities
- Development of a database for people with disabilities
- Training and education programs
- Orthopedic workshops
- Physiotherapy programs
- Income generation programs
- Training and capacity building projects

Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) intends to increase its operational capacity to include MDDs, flails and seven rapid response teams (RRTs), which will be configured to conduct small clearance, marking and EOD tasks as well as community liaison MRE activities. EMAO will continue to seek donor support for these new capacities.

MRE activities in direct support of the four manual demining companies are starting to produce results, as communities in the surrounding areas are beginning to report UXO and other hazards. Formal MRE education training was conducted at EMAO in late March/early April 2003, with participation from UNICEF, EMAO, the Rehabilitation and Development Organization (RaDO), Tigray and Afar regional authorities, and national authorities. RaDO MRE activities and victim data collection continued in the Tigray and Afar regions.

A contract with the World Bank was signed on April 12, providing for the extension of EMAO's current operations through September 2003 and for the expansion of its operational capacity. This enhanced capacity will include seven RRTs, national quality assurance (QA) monitors and a Field Coordination Office in the Tigray region. In addition, it

will provide for the contracting of an MDD capability and the procurement of mini-flails to be integrated with the manual operations.

Iraq

In response to the urgent need for mine action coordination due to the war in Iraq, a Mine Action Advisor has been appointed and is in place in Iran. He has been assessing the safety of the refugee camps from the mine action point of view. Recommendations for safety improvements at the camps and for the staff working in the vicinity of the camps have been given to Iranian authorities. The Mine Action Advisor will continue to coordinate emergency mine action activities in Iran.

Laos

Laos has developed a new five-year strategy draft, which was forwarded to the Mine Action Team (MAT) for review and comment prior to being submitted for further consideration. This matter is pending. During the first quarter of 2003, Laos operations cleared 219,1656 hectares of contaminated land, destroyed 6,024 pieces of UXO in clearance operations and conducted clearance in 341 villages. During the first quarter of 2003, there were seven accidents due to mines/UXO.

Mozambique

UNDP's Executive Board visited Mozambique to view overall assistance to the country over the past 20 years. Mine action was one of the themes discussed from both an operational and a management perspective.

The mine action program is currently facing a shortfall in funding in the following areas:

- Technical survey
- Quality control (QC) (establishment of three regionally based National Demining Institute (IND) Quality Control (QC) teams to ensure compliance with national standards for mine clearance)
- Testing centre (monitoring and evaluation of dog and mechanical assets);
- Survivor assistance.

Somalia

In April, the Somalia Mine Action Centre (SMAC) was re-subcontracted to undertake mine action operations in Somaliland. SMAC continued its support of Police EOD Teams, which have recovered and destroyed 200 pieces of UXO.

After the recent completion of an LIS in Somaliland, it is clear that this region has a significant mine problem. The Danish Demining Group (DDG) and SMAC implemented this EC-funded project. However, over the last 12 months, the clearance agencies have had to scale back their operations because of funding shortfalls. As a result, SMAC has been unable to adequately address the mine problem in high-impact areas in Somaliland, which have been identified in the LIS.

Tajikistan

In response to a request by the government of Tajikistan, the UNDP is planning to assist the government in designing an appropriate response to the landmine problem. The project is called "Capacity Building Assistance to the National Mine Action Programme in Tajikistan."

Yemen

The Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) and the Operations Technical Advisor (OTA) have been evacuated from Yemen due to security considerations. Arrangements are underway to temporarily assign the CTA to Cyprus and the OTA to Iran to assist with preparation of an Iraq contingency. The mine action operations in Yemen are progressing as normal. The UNDP has one international advisor in the country who plans to remain there.

UNICEF Updates

Headquarters Activities

The UNICEF Regional Director for Europe officially launched the UNICEF Mine Action Strategy at the MASG meeting in Geneva on March 21st. The Strategy has been branded according to new UNICEF guidelines and disseminated throughout the mine action

community and UNICEF country offices.

UNICEF and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) met and started to organize a training course in field epidemiology. The course is intended to allow MRE and other mine action operators to utilize epidemiological tools in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of their activities. The training will run for around 10 days and be conducted in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, initially for 20–25 students. Dates for the training have tentatively been set for October 2003.

Afghanistan

UNICEF Afghanistan continues to work within the framework of the long-standing national capacity, attempting to standardize some of the training and facilitate the shift from traditional methods to more community-based approaches. More than 18,000 teachers have received MRE training and the program continues. The shift is from emergency programs to sustainable community-based programs with more direct program implementation. The approaches that will be taken are a quick-response capacity, community-based programs, an expanded capacity of government and local partners, and a public information and mass media campaign.

UNICEF maintains the lead role for MRE coordination, technical assistance, and capacity building for the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA). UNICEF/MAPA continues to direct MRE to populations at risk—mass media campaigns such as the BBC/AEP “New Home, New Life” drama, in-school MRE teacher training programs and community-based MRE activities—and is currently developing a new community-based MRE program that will target 2,500 high-risk communities identified through the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan’s (MACA’s) retrofit survey to begin implementation in mid-2003.

Liaison work has begun with the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled to begin an information exchange system for data collected by the Ministry’s disability survey and UNMACA IMSMA victim surveillance systems. Data collection on mine/UXO injury will be integrated into community-based MRE activities this year. A new working group is about to be launched to strengthen data collection and information exchange mechanisms within various agencies for better reporting and needs analysis of data.

Cambodia

UNICEF continues to work with NGOs to integrate MRE into the education curriculum. Community-based mine risk reduction projects are developing, and the goals are to bridge the gap between mine action actors and the local community and to strengthen communities’ capacity to better manage mine-related problems.

Colombia

Support groups for landmine survivors have been established, and rights care providers trained local communities on landmine survivors’ rights in 14 municipalities in the Antioquia and Cauca provinces. Survivors received sessions of legal assistance in order to assess their compensations and health services.

Eritrea

UNICEF has recruited a new MRE officer in Eritrea. The Country Office is working toward the development of a community-based approach to MRE with plans to work with the Ministry of Education. UNICEF has recently started to re-establish the community-based MRE program and to deploy MRE Teams in the field, in collaboration with the Eritrean Demining Authority and Eritrean Demining Operations. UNICEF, together with counterparts, is in the process of recruiting staff to form six MRE Teams that will be trained to convey the MRE messages to the population and to mobilize the communities.

UNICEF, together with the UNMEE Force Mine Action Centre, is finalizing a set of standards for a safety training package and training delivery. The aim of this document is to provide a foundation from which MRE training can be made available to all of the UNMEE peacekeepers, civilian and military.

Guatemala

UNICEF continues to support a landmine/UXO program in Guatemala performed by a local NGO called Asociación de Capacitación y Asistencia Técnica en Educación y Discapacidad

(Association for Training and Technical Assistance on Education and Disability, or ASCATED). Five centers have been strengthened with training, equipment and performance monitoring. Centers are located in areas where armed conflict took place. At the present time, the UNICEF/ASCATED program has identified more than 140 victims of UXO/landmines; the majority of them are persons who did not belong to either the army or a guerrilla group.

Iraq

UNICEF, as part of the Mine Action Coordination Team (MACT), is presently in Basra establishing a coordination mechanism for MRE activities and planning the distribution of printed materials. With the support of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), UNICEF has finalized the recruitment of an MRE consultant who will support the activities of the MACT and UNICEF country office in Iraq. The consultant arrived in Iraq in mid-May.

Northern Caucasus

The local NGO Voice of the Mountains (VoM) reported that 1,815 entries for landmine victims both killed and injured during the two conflicts in Chechnya have been input in the UNICEF-IMSMA database so far. VoM has designed a new MRE leaflet with technical recommendations from UNICEF. The final draft will be discussed with other MAP actors, after which UNICEF will start the process of production of approximately 71,000 copies for distribution in Chechnya. Additionally, more than 500 teachers from every functioning school in Chechnya have recently been trained in MRE.

A group of 380 internally displaced children residing in Yandare spontaneous settlement in Ingushetia participated in an interactive MRE drama presentation. Children who answered questions correctly were awarded with UNICEF MRE T-shirts and notebooks. Let's Save the Generation (LSG), the local NGO responsible for registering and accompanying children, has also distributed 380 MRE posters requesting the further dissemination of information by the children among their peers and families.

Handicap International (HI) has approached UNICEF for the finalization of the draft Directory for Disabled People living in the northern Caucasus. The Directory will provide the disabled with information on different types of survivor assistance available in the region as well as the names and addresses of contact persons.

Somalia

In Somaliland, an LIS has been completed, revealing that one in four people is living in a dangerous mine-affected area. A Knowledge Attitudes Perceptions (KAP) survey has also been completed in the region.

HI-France and UNICEF are developing a strategy with SMAC to establish an MRE program. Plans have been developed to incorporate MRE issues into the youth radio programs currently aired throughout the country. Plans are also in place to integrate MRE into quick-response team planning.

Sri Lanka

UNICEF is working on establishing a more sophisticated and comprehensive coordination mechanism and is also focusing its efforts on enhancing its activity at the community level. UNICEF Sri-Lanka is working with the Ministry of Education to develop specific MRE components of the national curriculum, which are expected to be ready by the end of July 2003.

Four UNICEF MRE/SA District Coordinators are supporting the overall MRE activities in their respective areas. Two of them work in the District Mine Action Office in Jaffna and Vavuniya. The other two are based in UNICEF base-offices in Kilinochchi and Trincomalee. NGO Save the Children Fund (SCF) signed an agreement of cooperation with UNICEF to commence MRE activities through schools and children's clubs. The NGO benefited from the rich experience already gained by the other branch in Jaffna. In Trinco, UNICEF conducted mine-safety training for 25 school principals.

UNICEF continues to support the activities that are leading to the incorporation of MRE into school curriculum. Last month, the National Institution for Education (NIE) organized a workshop to develop the MRE guidebook for teachers. A second workshop was organized

to develop the MRE exercise book for students. UNICEF and UNDP also signed a contract with Young Asia Television to develop and conduct a mass media campaign.

Sudan

The UNICEF Country Office has an urgent need to train national NGOs in mine issues. For this activity, a consultant is required. DCA will likely carry out a needs assessment in the coming months. Canada has pledged \$250,000 while Finland has pledged €300,000 over three years to fund MRE activities in Sudan. The UNICEF United Kingdom National committee has pledged \$50,000 to fund MRE Activities in south Sudan.

Provisional MRE Guidelines and Standards have now been developed as the basic requirement for accreditation of relevant partners in government of Sudan (GoS)-controlled areas. The UNICEF office for south Sudan is moving forward on the employment of a dedicated MRE advisor and will soon fill this much-needed post.

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

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