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MASG Update

The following article highlights the recent activities of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG). Included are 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 the September 2003 MASG Newsletter

Developments in UNMAS-Supported Programs

Iraq

As a result of the bombing of the UN HQ in Baghdad, the overall deterioration of the security environment in Iraq and the evacuation of most UN staff from Iraq, most UN international mine action staff members were temporarily relocated from Iraq to Amman, Jordan, and Kuwait and operations were suspended. MineTech International, contracted under the UN Mine Action Rapid Response Plan, has returned to southern Iraq and expects to re-commence its operations in the coming days.

Afghanistan

Mine clearance operations were recommenced across all regions over the period of July–August after completion of security reviews and an increase in the numbers of security personnel deployed along key routes. As a result of the recent bombing in Iraq, security for the Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA) office locations was also reviewed by Field Security Officers. This evaluation identified a need for the relocation of the MACA from its current premises in Kabul to a more secure area due to heightened UN minimum-security requirements. Discussions are being held with the government to identify an appropriate site for this relocation.

Sudan

With the recent arrival of the new Chief Technical Advisor, Mr. Jim Pansegrouw, considerable effort has been devoted to building upon and further developing the working relationship between the National Mine Action Office (NMAO) and the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC). On 10 August 2003, the government of Sudan completed the internal procedure to ratify the Ottawa Treaty. As a next step, the government must give their instrument of ratification to the UN Secretary-General. Six months after doing so, they will become a State Party to the Ottawa Treaty.

UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE)—Eritrea

In light of a number of mine incidents during the month of July 2003, both in Sector West and Sector Center, the UNMEE Mine Action Coordination Center (MACC) reviewed and revised the UNMEE MACC Mine and UXO Threat Assessment document. The UNMEE MACC's new contractor for route clearance, Mechem (a South African commercial company), arrived in the country during the weeks of the 18th and 25th of August 2003. Mechem is replacing UXB International, which departed at the end of July 2003. During August 2003, the UN Peacekeeping Force, together with the MACC explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) Field Team, cleared three mines, disposed of 166 pieces of UXO and cleared an area of 449,234 sq m. Since January 2003, the UNMEE Peacekeeping Force demining units and the MACC EOD Field Team have cleared 458 mines, 1806 pieces of UXO and 8,043,917 sq m of land.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)—Southern Lebanon

Over four million square meters of land have now been cleared and handed back to local communities. Phase II (areas 1–4) of Operation Emirates Solidarity (OES) was completed 10 months ahead of schedule. In these areas, 34,862 AP mines, 1,533 AT mines and 3,261

pieces of UXO were cleared from minefields. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has agreed to continue OES, and Area 5 is now underway. As of the end of August, a total of 173,548 sq m of contaminated land had been cleared and handed back to the community, with over 11,000 mine/items of UXO already located and destroyed. In order to further monitor the benefits to the communities and to identify any non-mine action related requirements necessary for utilization of the land, a post-clearance review of the cleared areas is now underway, in partnership with the UNDP.

United Nations Mission in Congo (MONUC)—Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

The three-month mine risk education (MRE) campaign conducted by the Mine Awareness Trust (MAT) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plan for the repatriation of Angolan refugees is now complete. Since June, the MACC has continued to coordinate mine/UXO activities conducted by MONUC and the multi-national military forces (MNF) in the area of Bunia and by a commercial contractor, Mechem, to address operational requirements, including the verification of the Bunia-Beni road. Necessary resources have been secured through the MONUC budget and from voluntary contributions to fully support the MACC core costs as well as emergency mine action activities until the end of 2003.

Update From UNDP

Afghanistan

Staff recruitment and training have been completed; staff will shortly be deployed to the field to conduct the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS). Data obtained through the LIS will be used to identify priority clearance areas.

Albania

The U.S. State Department has agreed to fund MRE activities and a project for the reintegration of mine victims in 2003–2004. In May 2003, the Slovenian Centre and Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE) agreed to work together to strengthen Albania's capacity to manage survivor assistance projects, including the physical rehabilitation of mine victims in Albania.

Azerbaijan

Under the direction of the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA), preliminary work has begun to clear a newly identified minefield located in the Agdam and Fuzuli districts. In August 2003, 16 ANAMA specialists received training from the U.S. European Command of U.S. Special Forces with respect to advanced UXO. In July and August 2003, MRE training was provided to 360 people in 13 rural villages. In August 2003, a pilot survey of landmine victims was conducted, which included interviews to assess their needs. Construction of a regional office in northwest Azerbaijan has begun.

Chad

A donor's conference, attended by representatives from Canada, Great Britain and Italy, was held. Donors were updated about current operations in the field and new funding pledges were sought.

Eritrea

Approximately 50 percent of the ongoing LIS is complete. The Management, Operations and Information/Mapping Departments of the Eritrean Demining Agency are currently being established. Pending completion of the survey, interim strategic plans for demining, victim support and MRE have been approved and are being implemented. Approximately 1,200 of Eritrea's 3,461 communities are contaminated, affecting rural populations, nomadic peoples, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. There is insufficient funding to complete the LIS, and funding for mine clearance operations and UNDP's capacity building programme has only been secured through March 2004. Inadequate funding also precludes advances of most of the planned victim support activities.

Guinea-Bissau

In February 2003, the newly formed National Mine Action non-governmental organization (NGO) Lutamos Todos Contra as Minas (LUTCAM) was launched. This NGO employs trained national community surveyors and deminers. A Quality Control Monitor Group (QCM), trained by Accelerated Demining Programme (ADP) Mozambique, has been established to declare cleared minefields as mine free. The Center for Coordination of Anti-mines Actions

(CAAMI) has selected two persons from each mine clearance NGO to carry out quality control for CAAMI. A general community impact survey, conducted by two national community survey teams from LUTCAM, has been launched. By the end of July 2003, close to 505,000 sq m of contaminated land had been cleared, including the destruction of 2,500 landmines and 16,000 pieces of UXO; Emergency MRE activities have been launched in the high-risk areas of Bissau capital, with the training of 111 MRE personnel from 10 national NGOs. They have in turn trained 150 community liaison trainers in the capital and 160 trainers in other regions of the country. Key challenges include strengthening national capacities through training, leadership and management programmes, and developing standards for MRE and clearance activities.

Lebanon

The OES mine clearance project and Lebanese army clearance operations in the Bekaa Valley and south Lebanon have directly supported a major Council of Development and Reconstruction water pipeline project. The Lebanon LIS, which was released in September 2003, indicates that about 137 million sq m of mine/UXO-contaminated land remain to be cleared and that about 30 percent of the country's population of 3.7 million remains affected by mine/UXO. Lebanese army engineers have cleared ten million sq m of land since 1990. In addition, five million sq m of land has been cleared since 2002 through the OES project, 200,000 sq m by the Greek NGO International Mine Initiative (IMI) and 50,000 sq m by the UK NGO Mine Advisory Group (MAG). Mine casualty figures have been reduced by 75 percent since 2001. Because the lack of resources continues to be a major impediment to progress, long-term funding for MRE and landmine clearance is critical. Forty percent of affected areas still require MRE assistance, and the remaining 60 percent need updated training, to be consistent with the new international mine action standards for MRE. Some success has been achieved in mine victim assistance (MVA), but this area remains chronically under-funded.

Somalia

To date, more than 1.4 million sq m of land has been quality-controlled and handed back to local communities. The European Commission (EC)-funded LIS (phase I) has been completed. The two police EOD teams in Somaliland that are supported by the UNDP have been highly effective. Since the completion of their training, more than 10,000 items of UXO, stray ammunition and unwanted ammunition have been handed to the teams for destruction. The principal challenge is the establishment of a new phase of the programme in Puntland and the identification of a region in southern Somalia to base the two police EOD teams. There is a funding shortfall of \$652,000 (U.S.) for 2004.

Sudan

On 10 August 2003, the government of Sudan completed the internal procedure to ratify the Ottawa Treaty. A tender for the training of two teams, one from the north and one from the south, has been issued. International NGOs have been invited to submit proposals. On 20 August 2003, the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) announced that they have awarded a route verification contract to Mechem, a South African-based commercial mine clearance company. The area of operations will be the Lockichiko-Rumbek road. A number of constraints related to the ongoing hostilities in Sudan have limited the scale and effectiveness of mine clearance operations. These difficulties include the inability of operators to secure travel permits. Landmine operations have also been impeded by inclement weather, particularly in the Nuba Mountains.

Updates From UNICEF

Afghanistan

UNICEF continues to provide overall coordination, technical support and capacity-building initiatives for MRE activities for the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA). During August, UNICEF supported the training of over 50 MRE trainers and supervisors in community-based MRE methodologies and implementation strategies. Distribution of 200,000 child-focused MRE posters began through schools and community-based activities. Distribution of 200,000 brochures has also begun through MAPA partner activities in IDP camps, encashment centers for returnees and in community-based activities. Twelve three-minute, MRE mini-dramas for radio broadcast have been supplied to UNICEF zonal offices in Afghanistan for further distribution to provincial radio stations. In addition, over 500 non-formal schoolteachers have received MRE training and materials

to provide regular MRE lessons in their classrooms.

Burundi

On 22 July, Burundi ratified the Ottawa Treaty. Also during July, MRE was instrumental in preparing and implementing emergency activities when Bujumbura was a target of attacks. The emergency MRE sensitized the populations in the most affected areas of Musaga and Kanyosha. Information and sensitization sessions were organized in the displacement center, as well as in the affected areas. In August, follow-up emergency activities continued, and a project covering Makamba, Ruyigi, Rutana, Bujumbura Rural and Bubanza provinces was launched. To increase awareness of the project, information events ranging from meetings to football matches were carried out at a provincial level. Also during August, training sessions started that targeted 125 teachers.

Colombia

To strengthen relationships in mine and UXO risk reduction education, UNICEF's representative in Colombia, Manuel Manrique, met with government and health secretaries in Antioquia province, members of the Colombian Campaign Against Landmines (CCAL) and other mine action partners in Antioquia. The objective of the meeting was to announce a cooperation agreement among civil society, Antioquia's authorities and UNICEF to develop humanitarian mine action activities in 2003 and 2004. Also, during August and September, UNICEF Colombia led a series of meetings in the framework of the Mine Action Portfolio.

Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO)

In September, the ESARO regional office contracted a consultant to assist in supporting mine action initiatives in the region until mid-December. Nine countries in the region face a substantial mine problem, with UNICEF actively involved in eight of them.

Eritrea

During the reporting period, UNICEF, in cooperation with its counterparts the Eritrean Demining Authority (EDA) and the Eritrean Demining Operations (EDO) held MRE training sessions for the six UNICEF/EDO MRE field teams. The teams are now ready for deployment into mine-affected areas to provide MRE to affected populations. Regarding the MRE curriculum for primary schools, the Eritrean Ministry of Education has now provided feedback on the draft submitted by UNICEF and has requested that the curriculum be translated into all nine Eritrean national languages.

Ethiopia

The mine action programme in Ethiopia is now entering a consolidation phase and UNICEF will be mainstreaming its MRE activities. In pursuit of this, the responsibility for MRE will now be progressively transferred to government structures, with a phasing down of responsibility of the national NGO the Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (RaDO). To date, community-based and public education MRE activities in Afar and Tigray regions have been undertaken through RaDO.

Russia/North Caucasus

UNICEF partners have been conducting MRE presentations for Temporary Accommodation Centers' (TACs') inhabitants in Grozny. MRE sessions have covered 435 children in two TACs. UNICEF partner NGO, Let's Save the Generation (LSG), has been disseminating MRE posters near bus stations, markets and administrative buildings in Grozny, as well as in Gudermesskiy district. LSG also conducted the second stage of the community-based children's festival "Life on a Safe Territory," with the participation of some 170 children. The UNICEF MRE drama project has recently resumed, following its shift from North Ossetia (where 11,000 IDP children have been educated) to the Chechen State Drama Theatre in Grozny.

In survivor assistance activities, Voice of the Mountains (VoM) reported that three child mine survivors currently involved in the football training project have been admitted to higher schools in Chechnya. Another three are taking entrance exams for the College of Information Science, where they have received basic knowledge in computing through the vocational training run by VoM. Out of the 15 graduates from the previous course, three have already found employment as database managers, while six others have entered higher education institutions. The UNICEF-supported soccer team of child mine survivors,

Laman Az, won the third place in a youth tournament jointly organized in Grozny by VoM, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the social organization Step to the Future. The event, which was shown on Chechen television, is expected to encourage many other disabled children to think about participating in sport or other social activities, that would facilitate their full integration into society.

Sri Lanka

MRE NGOs working with host communities and IDPs continued their activities in Jaffna and Vanni. Community-based MRE and safety training for aid workers were carried out in the north and the east. In order to strengthen MRE activities for IDPs prior to their departure from the northern coast and central area, UNICEF signed an agreement of cooperation with the Puttalam-based NGO Community Trust Fund. New printed MRE materials were developed, field-tested and distributed to all MRE implementing partners. In the area of MRE in the school system, MRE manuals for teachers and students went to print. Meanwhile, special Training-of-Trainers was undertaken for more than 100 master teachers.

Sudan

The arrival of a new UNICEF consultant in the area of Sudan controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has given a boost to MRE work. She joins a UNICEF counterpart already attached to the National Mine Action Office (NMAO) in government-controlled areas. Early activities in southern Sudan are focusing on identifying client groups, ascertaining levels of awareness and concern of mine/UXO issues, and establishing the extent to which mine/UXO matters are taken into account in development and relief interventions. Other UNICEF activities include providing mine awareness training to southern Sudanese and international humanitarian workers and producing, in collaboration with UNICEF's Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), a broadsheet with mine messages to be included in a new south Sudanese newspaper. Meanwhile, in government-controlled areas, UNICEF developed Sudan-specific MRE training modules, which include training techniques and skills, community liaison activities and techniques, and public education, messages and methodologies. The Friends for Peace and Development Organization (FPDO), a national NGO, completed technical and managerial training of 40 IDP volunteers and five FPDO personnel who are now conducting MRE in IDP camps in Greater Khartoum.

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