

Under-Secretary-General Lacroix's remarks at the Arria-formula meeting

"Safeguarding Lives, Sustaining Peace: Enhancing Mine Action for Stabilization, Protection, Recovery and Inclusion."

12 December 2024

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

I thank Japan for convening today's important meeting to raise the visibility of mine action. I am also grateful for Japan's support to troop-contributing countries through the **Triangular Partnership Programme**, their commitment to **south-south cooperation** in mine action, and their **financial support** to the UN Mine Action Service.

I want to congratulate Ambassador Keo Chhea of Cambodia for the successful Fifth Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention recently convened in Siem Reap. Cambodia has become a model for countries that have emerged from conflict. I was heartened to visit Cambodia earlier this year where I saw the tremendous progress the country has in building peace at home and abroad. I deeply appreciate **Cambodia's contribution of explosive ordnance disposal and demining capabilities to peacekeeping** thirty years after hosting the first United Nations peacekeeping operation to conduct demining.

Surge in demand for mine action services

Excellencies,

There is a surge in demand for mine action services. This includes in **Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine**. Explosive remnants of war (**ERW**) in the rubble in **Gaza** will complicate the rebuilding process. ERW contamination across **Lebanon** will hinder UNIFIL patrols, the movement of civilians and reconstruction efforts. The ongoing war in **Sudan** has rolled back gains made in the clearance of explosive remnants of war and is littered with entirely new contamination in Khartoum and across the country. This will require a large-scale risk

education, survey and clearance response. In **Syria**, 28 percent of the population live with disabilities, many resulting from the armed conflict and have limited access to healthcare. Recent events have left large quantities of abandoned munitions on roadsides and unexploded ordnance on the roads. **Ukraine** is one of the most heavily contaminated countries in the world. An estimated 5-10 percent of the country's area is believed to require mine and ERW clearance, among which 139 square kilometers of agricultural land is affected. 80% of this land is vital for global food security and carbon sequestration.

The demand for services extends long after conflict ends. In the **Tigray and Afar regions of Ethiopia** 150 children were killed or maimed because of explosive ordnance during 2023. Children in these regions still await the clearance of schools that had been used for military purposes during the conflict. The longstanding contamination in **Afghanistan** continues to hinder agriculture and threaten children who collect and sell scrap metal mixed with explosives.

National authorities, UN mine action entities and their NGO and commercial partners are responding. But there is a distressing gap in funding for critical mine action activities that prevent death and injury, enable early recovery and sustainable peace.

The various roles UNMAS plays

The UN Mine Action Service executes mine action programmes that implement Security Council mandates and respond to requests from affected governments as well as the development and humanitarian communities. UNMAS always supports the national mine action architecture and works with authorities to ensure that:

- Survey and clearance tasks are appropriately prioritized to meet humanitarian and security objectives;
- information on the threat is used to inform explosive ordnance risk education for civilians and humanitarians;
- operations across the sector are conducted safely in accordance with relevant standards; and

- clearance is recorded in an information management system that ensures cleared land is made available once again for civilian use.

In a peacekeeping setting or when requested by national authorities, UNMAS will strengthen the capacity of national security services to operate in an explosive ordnance threat environment. SRSGs and Force Commanders count on UNMAS to conduct route clearance operations, participate in pre-deployment assessments, in-mission training, and support weapons and ammunition management. This work enables peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel to deploy safely to protect civilians.

Support to affected governments, respond to affected Member States requests

Excellencies,

UNMAS has been in **Gaza** for a decade providing risk education to the population, removing deep buried bombs and, since 7 October 2023, coordinating safe humanitarian convoys.

UNICEF, the ICRC, and mine action NGOs are coordinating to address the specific needs of affected communities.

UNMAS, collaborates with agencies, funds and programmes, NGO's and foundations to support the coordination of mine action in **Ukraine**.

In **Syria**, UNMAS coordinated and opened the sector for NGO operators and piloted clearance operations. Right now, UNMAS is working with UNDSS to plan route assessments and provide risk awareness for UN and NGO personnel who will encounter abandoned ammunition and ordnance scattered by airstrikes. This contamination will imperil efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance and ensure the safe movement of large numbers of displaced persons and returnees.

At the request of the Government of **Ethiopia**, UNMAS is supporting the Ethiopian Mine Action Office with information management, standard setting, quality assurance and advice on victim assistance referral systems.

UNMAS does not receive regular budget funding. Voluntary contributions are required if Member States expect UNMAS to provide mine action services.

We are grateful to Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States for their support to current programmes.

UNMAS in PKO settings

In eight peacekeeping and four special political mission UNMAS delivers diverse Security Council mandates to support national security forces and the peacekeeping contingents to operate in explosive ordnance threat environments, undertake survey, clearance and risk education to protect civilians, manage threat information and support the coordination of the mine action sector.

UNMAS is currently assisting **UNIFIL**, where the area of operations is now replete with unexploded ordnance, to plan for the safe redeployment of the Force.

In **UNMISS**, UNMAS has cleared hazardous areas on land that has been used for UNMISS bases, displaced persons sites, medical facilities and schools and clears roads to facilitate safe civilian movement and humanitarian assistance.

The UNMAS components of **MONUSCO** and **MINUSCA** are fulfilling mandates to strengthen the counter-IED and weapons and ammunition management capabilities of the national security forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

UNMAS and the Office of Military Affairs are strengthening the explosive ordnance threat mitigation capabilities of the **MINUSCA** Force, and in **UNSOS** UNMAS is supporting the **ATMIS** troops to operate more safely in an improvised explosive device threat environment.

In all peace operations where UNMAS is deployed, they deliver explosive ordnance risk education to local communities and humanitarian actors and share threat assessments to improve situational awareness.

Through the Triangular Partnership Programme, UNMAS is offering **counter IED training to African countries** that provide troops for peacekeeping operations or that want to strengthen their capabilities to face domestic or regional threats.

UNMAS in **UNAMA** implements a locally-staffed capability that conducts quality assurance for NGO operators and manages information on the completion of clearance tasks. Local and international NGOs are clearing contaminated land for agriculture and to prevent the casualties caused by scrap metal collection that contains ERW. Unfortunately, **the entire sector and the UNMAS coordination project depend on dwindling donor support.**

Conclusion and call to action

Excellencies,

My overall responsibility for the UN Mine Action Service of DPO includes serving as Chair of the United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (IACG-MA). I am proud to represent 12 entities that contribute to humanitarian mine action. My hope is that today's Arria Formula meeting can **catalyze a surge of political will and funding** to invest in a safer, more secure world free of the threats posed by explosive ordnance and committed to ensuring respect for the rights of victims.

I close by reiterating the **Secretary-General's call** for Member States to **meet their obligations and ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, while addressing the humanitarian and developmental impacts of landmines and other explosive ordnance through financial and technical support.**

Thank you.