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Mine Action Support Group Update

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Mine Action Support Group Update

The following article highlights the recent activities of the Mine Action Support Group from the first quarterly U.N. newsletter of 2006, including updates on the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF.¹

excerpted by Stacy Davis [U.S. Department of State]

The MASG is an informal forum of 26 members that meets quarterly to exchange information between donors and the U.N. Secretariat on mine-action activities and research. Representatives from mine-affected countries, nongovernmental organizations and experts are invited to report on the status of mine action in their countries. The MASG also works to achieve greater donor coordination and facilitate funding. The United States was unanimously elected to chair the committee in December 2005 and will continue to do so until 2007.

UNMAS

On 20 April 2006, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action adopted the United Nations' Inter-Agency Mine Action Strategy 2006–2010. The Strategy complements the inter-agency policy on mine action and effective coordination that IACG–MA principals adopted in June 2005. It also reflects lessons learned over the course of the implementation of the United Nations' Mine Action Strategy 2001–2005. Above all, the new strategy is results-based—its strategic goal and four strategic objectives focus on the impact, or the anticipated outcome, of U.N. mine action by 2010. The previous Strategy listed some 48 activities as “strategic objectives.” These were appropriate for departmental and agency work plans but did not assist in the organization of priorities and measurement of results. The content of the new Strategy is a significant improvement.

The text provides a situational analysis describing the assumptions, risks and challenges defining the context within which the United Nations believes its strategic goal and objectives can be achieved by 2010. The United Nations will work in partnership with others but, in light of its own mandates, advantages and resources, it is mindful of the responsibilities borne by other key actors in the mine-action sector.

The new Strategy reaffirms the United Nations' express commitment to supporting adherence to and compliance with the normative framework for mine action and refers expressly to the United Nations' commitment to continuous, transparent monitoring of progress and periodic reporting on implementation to the General Assembly.

U.N. Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the first quarter of 2006, the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and the Mines Advisory Group resumed their Emergency Impact Survey activities, starting with the area of Gbadolite in the Equateur province. Following its survey in 2005 of the northern Katanga district, DanChurchAid is now conducting mine/explosive remnants of war clearance operations within the priority areas identified by the survey. Part of these activities are funded through the end of the year, but more remains to be done and additional resources are required for increasing the capacities, particularly for surveys.

Eritrea. Demining operations as part of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea have gone through extensive changes in the first part of 2006. Due to governmental limitations on the use of helicopters for medical evacuations in Eritrean areas, most of the demining operations have moved closer to the Ethiopian border. Clearance operations are still ongoing in the Temporary Security Zone, including road clearance and UXO clearance. The UNMEE Mine Action Coordination Center is now focusing on planning mine-action support to the demarcation of the Eritrean/Ethiopian border. This support will use mechanical, manual and mine-dog capacities to ensure effective clearance of the border.

UNDP

Chad. Although funding for demining is low in Chad, several mine-action groups in the country are active. Key achievements include:

- Mines Advisory Group resumed operations from mid-January until the end of February 2006.
- Following a visit, the U.S. Department of State decided on a one-year extension of the MAG project (March 2006–February 2007), increasing the explosive ordnance disposal teams from one to three and allocating a budget of US\$2.2 million.
- The government of Switzerland is providing a Technical Advisor to the Information Management System for Mine Action database for six months beginning 1 May 2006.
- The National Demining Office participated in a meeting with a representative of the World Bank in order to study the possibility for the Bank to finance the national mine-action program with oil revenues.

Key challenges included:

- On 22 March 2006, following an incident at the High Committee for National Demining compound, the HCND staff was arrested and an interim coordinator was designated.⁴ All efforts aimed at strengthening the capacities of the HCND have suffered from this situation.

Key objectives were:

- In 2006, a technical assistance project that was about to be terminated due to lack of funds received US\$100,000 from the Chadian government and an additional US\$100,000 from UNDP Chad. This amount of money is not sufficient to resume mine-clearance activities, which stopped in mid-December 2005. At least US\$1 million is needed to cover the cost of operations for six months. Engaging the government and other external donors for the implementation of the National Mine Action Plan for 2006 remains the first key objective for the short term.

- The same effort should be used for the mine-risk education program, which stopped in December 2005 due to lack of funding.
- With the placement of a new Technical Advisor, updating the database, the HCND Web site and preparing the team for version 4 of the Information Management System for Mine Action will be possible.
- The need to contract an operator to resume operations as soon as possible has been recognized.

Funding shortfalls:

- The implementation of the Humanitarian National Mine Action Program is not funded for 2006.
- The explosive ordnance disposal team and deminers have been unemployed since mid-December 2005.

Sudan. Although under-funded, Sudan is making progress towards its mine-action goals. Key achievements in Sudan included:

- The National Mine Action Authority, with technical and advisory support from the UNDP, was officially launched in a ceremony in Khartoum held on 7 March 2006.
- With support from UNDP Sudan, the NMAA developed organizational structures for the National Mine Action Center–Khartoum and the Regional Mine Action Center in Southern Sudan–Juba and has started to recruit additional national staff.
- UNDP Sudan contributed to the on-time preparation and submission of the updated Article 7 report for 2005, a requirement for Sudan under the Ottawa Convention.²
- UNDP Sudan finalized the recruitment process of a Technical Advisor based in Juba and two National Programme Officers, one each in Khartoum and Juba. The new staff members are scheduled to join the UNDP by the end of May 2006.

The following were key objectives for Sudan:

- Continue to recruit additional staff for the Mine Action Centers in Khartoum and Juba by providing technical advice and support.
- Provide additional equipment (furniture, computers, vehicles, supplies) for the establishment and expansion of the Mine Action Centers in Khartoum and Juba.
- Conduct a training-needs assessment for the national staff working in both mine-action centers.
- Provide technical support and advice to the NMAA to streamline mine action into national recovery and development plans and to develop a resource-mobilization campaign/strategy.
- Support the National Mine Action Center to build national clearance operations capacities as a joint project of the authorities in the north and south.

Sudan also experienced funding shortfalls during this period. The UNDP is in urgent need of US\$4.7 million to support the establishment of National and Regional Mine Action Centers in Khartoum and Juba and for the training, equipment and operations cost of the national mine/UXO clearance teams (140 national personnel) as part of the national operations capacity building with deminers provided by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Sudan Armed Forces. This initiative supports the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.³

Uganda. Some of the key achievements in Uganda were as follows:

- The National Mine Action Steering Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary to the Office of the Prime Minister was established and commenced work.
- The National Mine Action Legislation and Mine Action Policy were drafted.
- The newest version of the Information Management System for Mine Action (4.0) was installed, user training conducted and field tests started.

- Needs assessments started in the affected districts of Lira and Soroti and Technical Survey/clearance/explosive ordnance disposal operations started in Kabaramaido, facilitating the return of internally displaced persons.

- The Ugandan Mine Action Center was officially opened by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees.

- A Victim-assistance Technical Advisor has commenced work.

Key objectives included:

- Complete Technical Survey/clearance/EOD operations in identified IDP areas in Kabaramaido and Katakwi.
- Perform targeted needs assessments in two more landmine- and ERW-affected areas in northern Uganda.
- Develop a national disaster-management database utilizing IMSMA version 4.0.
- Develop a surveillance network in the Ministry of Health.

The funding situation in Uganda is as follows:

- Currently available for 2006: US\$1.4 million for capacity development, Technical Survey/clearance/EOD, targeted needs assessments, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation from the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Norway, the International Mine Action Training Centre–Nairobi and the UNDP.
- Unconfirmed pledges and expressed interest: US\$1.3 million for Technical Survey/clearance/EOD, quality assurance and victim assistance from Austria, Japan, the United Kingdom, Canada, Switzerland and the United Nations Mine Action Service.
- Targeted needs assessments in six northern districts amounting to US\$343,000.
- To continue needs assessments in two districts, US\$115,000 is urgently required in May 2006.
- An additional six months for technical assistance, specifically a Victim-assistance Advisor, is needed and US\$124,000 is required no later than June 2006.
- US\$180,000 is urgently required for a national surveillance network/database for landmine survivors and war disabled within IDP camps.

UNICEF

Angola. UNICEF Angola continues to support the capacity development of the mine-risk education section of *Comissão Nacional Intersectorial de Desminagem e Assistência Humanitária* and continues as the focal point for MRE among U.N. agencies.

During the reporting period, UNICEF continued technical and financial support to field-based MRE activities through eight local nongovernmental organizations and one international NGO, based in nine of the most mine-contaminated provinces: Huila, Malanje, Moxico, Kwanza Sul, Kwanza Norte, Uige, Bie, Huambo and Kwando Kuvango. In addition to implementing interactive MRE instruction utilising theatre performance, puppet shows, songs and visual materials, these NGOs have mobilized and trained community volunteers and mine committees as sustainable agents to continue reminding people about the dangers of mines and to inform them about making the right contacts when mines are found. In February, each NGO participated in exchange visits to other implementing NGOs to share experiences on implementing MRE activities in the field and difficulties they are facing in forming and training mine committees.

UNICEF also supports the Angolan Committee of the Red Cross (ARC) to work with CNIDAH to determine the new orientation for MRE and training needs. The needs assessment for training was finalized, indicating the radio announcements and police presentations were particularly effective in disseminating

MRE information. Based on the research findings, ARC designed and is field-testing police training manuals. UNICEF will publish them once they are approved.

MRE materials designed and produced by UNICEF were widely disseminated not only through UNICEF-supported NGOs but also through Handicap International–France and the International Committee of the Red Cross to implement MRE programs.

UNICEF, together with the UNDP, supported CNIDAH to organize an event to celebrate the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance on 4 April 2006. A joint press release was distributed by UNICEF and the UNDP to inform media about the global activities planned on this date and mine-action activities implemented by U.N. agencies. One of the highlights of the event was the MRE performance provided by *Palanca Negra*, one of the nine UNICEF-supported NGOs, from the province of Malange. *Palanca Negra* demonstrated vividly the dangers represented by mines, engaging villagers, especially children, in interactive play and real-life situations. UNICEF displayed posters, educational materials and campaign materials. This event was widely covered by national television stations and major national newspapers.

On 3 and 4 May 2006, UNICEF supported CNIDAH in organizing a national meeting on:

- Introduction of the newly drafted National Mine Action Strategy (2006–2011) and new focus for MRE strategy
- Utilization of Landmine Impact Survey data for the programming cycle
- Creation of an emergency-to-development approach for MRE programming
- Revision of the MRE data collection form for IMSMA
- Effectiveness of implementing a radio-based program for MRE

Key actors of MRE, including NGOs, Ministry of Education teacher-trainers and provincial representatives on mine action, were invited.

In May, an in-service teacher training for 20,000 first-grade teachers began in support of the nationwide expansion of the education reforms for first grade. All teachers who participate in this training received MRE as a part of a national package of life-skills education. UNICEF prepared a package of educational materials for the teachers to take back to their schools.

Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNICEF–DRC has been one of the major actors conducting MRE in the DRC with the support of its international and national partners. Four out of the six targeted provinces in the current project are reached by UNICEF projects, which were completed by the end of March 2006.

From February 2006 to March 2006:

- In South Kivu province, 19,201 persons, especially returnees from Tanzania, were reached directly in Fizi Territory with MRE in 14 schools and 54 villages; 32,000 other persons were indirectly reached via local radio.
- In North Katanga, particularly in the triangle, Pweto–Moba–Muliro, MRE was given to 6,000 persons from February to March 2006, focusing on returnees from Zambia and internally displaced persons.
- In Equateur province, MRE reached 6,000 students and 16,200 others via schools and villages through 150 cartoon animators. Also, 58,000 returnees from Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, and 50,000 IDPs in Equateur province received MRE.
- An assessment mission continued in Ikela to determine the total number of beneficiaries for MRE interventions planned during April 2006.
- In Province Orientale, 275 students from nine primary schools

were trained in MRE and 2,851 students and 54 teachers of these schools were reached via the trained students. An additional 420 members of communities and 90 members of community relays in six villages were trained and 2,511 inhabitants of these villages were reached directly.

Only one project is ongoing in Ikela. Due to a current funding shortage, it is not possible to take current MRE initiatives in the DRC to scale. Due to the size of the country, the ongoing insecurity in some areas, inaccessibility, and communication problems, demining and destruction of mines are being implemented at a slow pace. There is a need to continue program implementation and strengthening of MRE activities as a necessary life-saving initiative benefiting affected and vulnerable populations.

Ethiopia. UNICEF–Ethiopia has been working with its MRE partners to implement the recommendations of the MRE program evaluation⁵ that was conducted in 2005. The recommendations included strengthening program-coordination and project-management skills and developing a sustainable surveillance system and an emergency-preparedness plan. UNICEF facilitated a meeting with the Ethiopian Mine Action Office, the Office for Rehabilitation and Social Affairs, and the Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (RaDO) to discuss roles and responsibilities.

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UNICEF, through its implementing partner, and with the federal and regional governments' involvement, has commenced the pilot Village Profile Project. The objective is to discuss the community's mine-action challenges in a development context, and to collect data on victims and assistance required for the victims and risk-takers. Using a participatory approach, mine-affected communities are invited to share with RaDO the development challenges their villagers face on a daily basis, and from this information, program stakeholders will identify future challenges for the MRE project in Ethiopia. RaDO will encourage the community to take responsibility for the problems it faces and inform them of available services to deal with their challenges in the governmental and nongovernmental sectors.

If mines/ERW are in the top five priorities of the community challenges, RaDO will facilitate the community to develop its own solutions to live safely in the mine-affected areas. The community will look at who the risk-takers and victims are and discuss ways to reduce the number of risk-takers and victims through MRE activities. If communities do not see mines or ERW as a problem and if there have been no incidents in the previous two years, all partners will review the need to provide direct MRE to these communities. It is hoped this project will assist communities to have more ownership of their problem and facilitate government partners to effectively

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and efficiently plan their MRE program through data analysis, thereby reducing subjective approaches to program implementation. This project will also help move the surveillance system forward. Results of this pilot project will be available in May 2006 when UNICEF, with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, facilitates data analysis and effective programming for the government partners and RaDO.