

20th International Meeting of National Mine Action Directors and United Nations

Advisers

7-10 February 2017, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Chair's Summary

Introduction

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), as Chair of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Mine Action (IACG-MA), convened the 20th International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers (NDM-UN) from 7 to 10 February 2017 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva. This year's theme was the 'needs driven, people centred' nature of mine action.

Goal of the Meeting

The annual meeting provides an opportunity for the mine action community to review and exchange perspectives on challenges and progress, best practices and lessons learnt. This 20th Meeting also marked the 20th anniversary of UNMAS, the IACG-MA and the adoption of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. As a result, an overarching theme of the conference was '20 Years of Mine Action', with speakers collectively reflecting on the ways in which mine action has evolved over the past two decades and how the challenges of today can be effectively tackled by drawing on best practice and lessons learnt from the past.

Participation

Over 550 delegates registered for the meeting, the highest number to date. The uniqueness of this international meeting resides in the diversity of mine action stakeholders that it gathers, including: directors of national mine action programmes in affected states; representatives of donor countries from capitals; United Nations mine action advisers; as well as civil society organizations and commercial companies.

Agenda

The first half of the meeting discussed the relevance of mine action to broader structures and processes, for example international humanitarian law (IHL), peace agreements, stabilization, protection planning and the Sustainable Development Goals. The second part of the meeting focused on improving mine action operations' impact and effectiveness, through *inter alia* innovative approaches, new technologies and an increased focus on community-led programming. In between sessions, nine side events tackled various issues such as the linkages between mine action with displacement, the challenges posed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the importance of women's contributions, and monitoring and evaluating the impact of mine action.

Panels and Speakers

The Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva, Mr. Michael Møller, delivered remarks at both the opening and closing ceremonies at which he was joined by a number of individuals who played a key role in the formation of the humanitarian mine action sector, including the first Director of UNMAS, Mr. Martin Barber; Dr. Jean-Baptiste Richardier, founder of Handicap International; Dr. Mohammed Haider Reza who made a vital contribution to Afghanistan's accession to the Mine Ban Treaty and Mr. Sediq Rashid, one of the first Afghan deminers who now holds a senior position in the UNMAS programme in Somalia.

This year's meeting also benefited from the contributions of United Nations Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Mr. Volker Turk; Special Representative of the Secretary General for Libya Mr. Martin Kobler; and former Swedish Ambassador Mr. Staffan Tillander, currently serving as the Director of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group in the UN Mission in Somalia.

The Permanent Representatives of Austria, Colombia, Italy and the Netherlands chaired plenary sessions; other high level speakers also included Nobel Peace Laureate, Mr. Rae McGrath; German Representative to the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Michael Biontino; and former BBC Foreign Correspondent, Mr. Mike Wooldridge. Ten national directors of mine action programmes presented across a range of issues, exemplifying the increasing levels of ownership and capacity at the national level.

Special attention was given to linguistic diversity and gender representation when designing the agenda and the composition of the panels. For instance, Ms. Arach Orech, a Ugandan landmine survivor and advocate delivered a keynote address, and Ms. Hamadi, a Libyan civil society representative presented on the empowerment of women and their contribution to the reduction of the threats posed by small arms and light weapons in Libya.

Publicity and Media Coverage

A press conference held a day in advance of the meeting attracted over 20 representatives of Swiss and international wire services and media, including Agence France Press, Reuters, Voice of America and Radio Vatican. Likewise, the UNMAS launch of the web-based "2017 Portfolio of Mine Action Projects", which includes over 200 mine action projects and presents mine action funding needs of USD 511m, also raised media interest. Via the handle #NDMUN20, the meeting generated over 500 tweets by over 150 individuals, reaching almost 4 million people.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations from Plenary Sessions

This section provides a brief summary of each plenary and side event highlighting conclusions and key recommendations.

Full audio versions of all plenaries are available on the registration site: http://www.mineaction.org/unmas/registration-NDM_UN20

Plenary One: International Humanitarian Law and Mine Action: Challenges and Progress

The first plenary examined the importance of developments in international humanitarian law related to mine action over the last two decades. The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention's success to date was reviewed and future challenges identified and discussions were centred on the major threats of today, noting the rise in civilian casualties due to explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- Improve data collection and recording for the purposes of communications and advocacy to donors and to the general public on the ongoing impact of landmines/ERW.
- Analyse how IHL and other mine action-related instruments can be applied to help reduce the threat of Victim-activated IEDs and other explosive devices.

Plenary Two: Mine Action as a Confidence Building Measure in Reconciliation and Peace Processes

This session examined how mine action has, and is, being used to build confidence in peace processes, for example through the use of demining teams from parties to the conflict working together to promote community recovery.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- The role of mine action in peace and reconciliation processes as well as relationships between the sector and peace mediators should be strengthened.
- The common 'language' of deminers, military and other armed actors serves an enabler for building confidence during or after conflict.

Plenary Three: Mine Action Facilitating and Supporting Stabilization

This session examined the concept of stabilization and how mine action is integrated into such strategies from the perspective of a variety of stakeholders, including both an affected state and other countries working to support stabilization activities in partnership with host governments.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- Iraq and Libya demonstrated the increasing linkages between stabilization and humanitarian mine action, where the goal is to reduce loss of life and support the reestablishment of communities.

- The European Union highlighted the success of the “blended approach” employed in Iraq which combined national and international commercial companies and NGOs. This approach enabled them to put into place an emergency survey and a clearance response in areas retaken from ISIL, in direct support of the Iraqi Government and UN stabilization strategies and humanitarian assistance efforts. It was suggested that this provides many lessons learned for other complex cases, although it is necessary to adjust strategies to the particular country and context.
- It is important for the international community to understand that the current challenges go beyond a historical landmine legacy in some contexts. There is a need for support to the national authorities to manage current threats, such as improvised explosive devices.

Plenary Four: Integrating Protection into Humanitarian Mine Action Planning

This panel argued that there is a need for a more systematic integration of protection analysis into mine action programming and projects. Land rights and mine action were discussed in general and in relation to the challenges and urgency of providing for the safe resettlement of populations in Afghanistan.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- Mine action plays a crucial role in ensuring protection and humanitarian action as evidenced through its inclusion into the Global Protection Cluster.
- There is a need for improved coordination among protection actors.
- There is a need for integrated and mainstreamed protection work in humanitarian mine action programming.

Plenary Five: Mine Action as an “Accelerator” Towards the SDGs

This panel explained how mine action can play a strategic role in mainstreaming and accelerating national implementation of the 2030 Agenda in contaminated countries. Findings of a study on this topic were presented and insights from National Directors from Afghanistan and Laos PDR on how they have ensured that the role of mine action is highlighted through the 2030 Agenda were provided.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

- There is an opportunity to ensure that the role of mine action as an ‘accelerator’ of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is highlighted, specifically through advocacy at the national level.
- Mine action actors were encouraged to develop theories of change to clarify how humanitarian mine action contributes to SDG goals and targets.

Plenary Six: Mine Action Innovations (Methodologies and Technologies)

This session explored the developments in standards, new technologies, operational methods and tools, as well as methods for measuring the impact of mine action.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Innovation goes beyond equipment, it influences the way the sector thinks and organises itself.
- Development of IED Disposal standards is critical to support countries impacted by IEDs.
- Risk Education will require new approaches, particularly for IED risk education training.
- Research by the London School of Economics concluded that the aggregate impact of mine clearance on economic activity in Mozambique was larger than anticipated.

Plenary Seven: Mine Action through Community-Based Approaches

This session explored practical examples from three countries where community-based strategies have proved beneficial. The wide-ranging examples included community based mine action in Somalia to improve the rule of law, risk education in Myanmar, and a female-led small arms and light weapons risk reduction programme in Libya.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations:

- To effectively implement “needs-driven, people-centred” mine action programmes, communities must be involved in designing and planning from the outset.
- Community-based approaches may also be complemented by top-down strategies, as was the case in Afghanistan - a risk education evaluation conducted there found that people who had received more than one type of risk education, for example, radio messaging as well as direct training, were six times more likely to report explosive hazards to mine action operators.

Plenary Eight: The Challenges of Completion

This plenary discussed the challenges and steps being taken by States Parties that are in the process of preparing their Article 5 extension requests for submission in 2017 (Angola and Zimbabwe), as well as a similar discussion on the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations:

- The key challenges to completion identified by the session included: political support, physical geography and funding.
- Positive suggestions to accelerate completion included the harnessing of new technologies and South-South cooperation.

SIDE EVENTS

1. IEDs and the challenges for Humanitarian Mine Action

This side event discussed a recent report on this issue and reflected on the challenges IEDs presented to the sector with particular reference to terminology; data management; neutrality; humanitarian principles; risk management; international mine action standards; sector division of labour; themes; the scale of the problem; information sharing between civil and military components and aspects of operational planning.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- Greater effort to codify how information should and can be shared needs to be made, an industry wide codification of purpose may be needed.
- Engagement is required within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons process to ensure that information sharing mechanisms are developed for IEDs/ improvised mines.

2. Enhancing Impact Monitoring

The side event focused on collaborative efforts of three NGOs (NPA, MAG and HALO Trust) to standardize approaches to reporting on impact for beneficiaries. The efforts were driven by donor interest and served to align respective internal programming and monitoring and evaluation approaches of each of three NGOs. The NGOs presented on the benefits and challenges of this approach, the process by which they were able to achieve this result and on the details of the agreed terminology and its application.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- NGOs have seen an improvement in their ability to report on impact, measuring broader outcomes, using data for evaluation and reporting across multiple programmes.
- Donor interest supports identifying broader impact for lives and livelihoods of intended beneficiaries.
- Measuring indirect beneficiaries remains unreliable and cannot be checked easily.
- UNMAS noted past collaboration on M&E approaches and confirmed facing many of same challenges as the NGOs in the UN M&E Mechanism for UN Strategy on Mine Action, which is also used to improve evidence-based management.

3. Measures for Effective Implementation of Community Based Demining

This side event presented case studies of the development and implementation of a community based demining approach in Afghanistan and Somalia. The process involves recruiting and training deminers from within impacted communities, a break from standard approaches where demining teams travel from outside the affected area to clear the mine/ERW contaminated area.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- Community based demining has proved effective in many contexts, bringing employment, training, skills, trust, and sustainability. However, it can be slower and supervision is required from experienced staff at various levels.
- It is important for organisations to correctly define “community” when developing projects and to ensure transparency and buy-in, community liaison (using an inclusive approach, not just the ‘power brokers’), and the management of expectations.

4. Nigeria Plus

This event aimed to present and exchange views on the explosive threat and mitigation approaches in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. All four countries are affected by the presence of ERW as well as IEDs, mostly person-borne IEDs and IEDs to target vehicle movements, but also abandoned IEDs.

Key Conclusions /Recommendations

- All speakers recommended the development of IED risk education materials as distinct from mine and ERW awareness and stressed the importance of finding ways to protect beneficiaries and staff, including through anonymous reporting.
- Bespoke approaches should be developed for each of the states, taking into account existing structures.

5. Intercultural Communication and Mine Action

This side event examined the ways in which cultural understanding and integration is vital for effective mine action, centring on the positive case study of UNMAS in Sudan. Specific issues discussed included communication styles and the interpretation of important non-verbal cultural signals.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- Intercultural communication is an important issue when implementing mine action in areas with wide ranging diversity of communication styles and culture.
- Regional workshops on this issue were suggested to expand the discussion and best practice on this topic.

6. Mine Action and Displacement

One of the most life threatening risks to internally displaced persons (IDPs) are explosive hazards. Displaced people do not have the freedom to choose escape routes and lack local knowledge that would enable them to avoid hazardous areas.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- The increased recognition of mine action as a critical protection actor is a positive development.
- UNHCR indicated mine action should be reflected in the Refugee Response Framework currently being coordinated by UNHCR.

7. Reciprocal empowerment: Women and Mine Action

Reciprocal empowerment means that mine action operations are made more effective by women's involvement and that being involved in mine action results in positive social, economic and political gains for women.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- The Gender and Mine Action Programme presented research from Lebanon and Colombia demonstrating the benefits for women involved in mine action in different contexts.
- Gender and diversity must be maintained as a priority for the mine action community and be revisited periodically, personalised, and its impacts continually researched.

8. An Integrated Approach to Victim Assistance

Victim Assistance (VA) is as important as the other pillars of mine action, but is often somewhat neglected. It is also poorly funded (receiving, on average, only 7 per cent of funding available for mine action). There are six components of VA: 1) Data collection to understand the challenges faced; 2) Medical care; 3) Rehabilitation; 4) Psycho-social support; 5) Socio-economic inclusion; 6) Laws and policies.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- The panel shared the “[Guidance on an Integrated Approach to Victim Assistance, by States for States](#)”.
- Mine-free does not mean victim-free – long after the closure of mine action centres, survivors will still have needs. So, for sustainability purposes, it is important that VA is not only housed in mine action centres.
- Even with limited funds it is possible to support victims by identifying them and referring them to assistance where it exists.

9. 20 Years of International Standards in Humanitarian Demining

UNMAS and GICHD presented on the history of the development of the IMAS since the late 1990s.

Key conclusions / recommendations

- The success of IMAS was attributed to the wide ranging consultation process, including the participation of Member States, and the way they have been adapted according to the changing contexts.