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A world free of landmines

**Wednesday, December 13 2017, 1:15 pm – 3pm
New York, CR11**

- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.
- I would like to thank the Permanent Representatives of Belgium and Colombia - for organising this event to commemorate the opening for signature of a crucial instrument of international humanitarian law, the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, in Ottawa, twenty years ago.
- The drafters of the Convention established a powerful link with the United Nations. They entrusted its Secretary-General to serve as its depository, a function which not all multilateral instruments have provided for. So, for us at the United Nations, and for UNMAS, in particular, 2017 also marks twenty years of steadfast United Nations support to the Convention, including through the establishment, by the UN General Assembly, of UNMAS, the specialized UN entity for mine action, mandated to coordinate the UN system.
- Two decades later, 162 States have joined the Convention, and the United Nations is operating in an increasing number of affected countries with positive results. Its significant role, recognized by the General Assembly, and its actions, are now measured and evaluated with a view to serving affected communities with greater impact and efficiency.
- "Needs driven and People centered", the mine action approach of the UN reflected in UNMAS logo, is a reality shared by all members of the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, a model of UN cross-pillar cooperation and actual synergies extended to the civil society partners, without whom progress would not be possible.
- Last year alone, across continents, UNMAS located and destroyed over 200,000 explosive hazards, including landmines. UNMAS cleared 161 square kilometres of land – visualise 15,000 football pitches - and opened 3,000 km of roads; and UNMAS provided risk education to 4.3 million people, the majority of whom were children.

What do these figures mean to affected communities?

- In South Sudan, where UNMAS has been working since 2004, 1000 water points are now free of contamination and accessible to communities. Children are being educated today in 170 schools that were previously dangerous. The people of South Sudan have 150 more clinics safe for vital medical services. The World Food Programme is delivering supplies on 28 thousand kilometres of road cleared by UNMAS, saving literally millions of dollars previously being spent on aircraft.
- In Sudan, last year Gedaref state was announced free of known landmine contamination, and this year in May, it was the turn of Red Sea state. Today 79 per cent of known mined land has been cleared.
- UNMAS efforts not only meet immediate needs. The lasting impact of UNMAS work on socio-economic recovery and development is tangible. An assessment undertaken last year in Afghanistan, where UNMAS has been a committed partner for over a decade, revealed that within one year of clearance, newly planted crops such as wheat, fruit, and pistachio, contributed over 218,000 dollars to the local economy - in just one area.
- Multiply this by the thousands of communities UNMAS has assisted during its twenty years of existence, UNMAS will continue to gather the UN strongest contribution to the 2030 Agenda which my UNDP friend, Magdy will talk about in a minute.
- The work of UNMAS also has a lasting, and positive, effect on the lives of victims. Last year 15 out of 18 UNMAS programmes provided victim assistance. Context specific, our response ranged from providing immediate emergency interventions, rehabilitation, psychosocial programmes, sustainable income initiatives, to building the capacity of affected countries to integrate victim assistance into their national frameworks.
- UNMAS puts the 2030 Agenda commitment to “leave no-one behind” at the heart of its work, ensuring that special attention is given to isolated communities and marginalised groups.

- In Afghanistan, UNMAS set up a mobile clinic to improve access in a country where 90 per cent of the population live more than 100 kilometres away from a rehabilitation centre. Female physiotherapists have been trained so that injured women who cannot travel independently can be reached at home.
- UNMAS has also developed innovative approaches to mine risk education, one of which received the 2017 Secretary-General's Award for innovation and creativity. The project aimed to reach people in remote areas of Darfur through a solar-powered device containing multiple pre-recorded audios - songs, interviews and messages - specifically designed to benefit people who may not be able to read or who live in areas that lack electricity.
- This is not just about UNMAS and Darfur; the creativity and innovative spirit of UNMAS lauded by the UN Secretary-General is the service UNMAS provides not only to its UN partners but to the mine action sector as a whole. It is the United Nations Service and we must always remember that in mine action, "One UN" extends to civil society and the whole sector.
- UNMAS doesn't only apply "the band-aid". UNMAS leads UN efforts to strengthen national capacity for sustainable national ownership and management of mine action programmes. This most important achievement of the UN is critical. The UN engagement in any given affected country is measured by its ability to build national capacities and is guided by its exit strategy.
- At the very earliest stage of an UNMAS deployment, an exit strategy is elaborated and implemented in close consultation with national authorities, so that UNMAS leaves responsibly, when national capacity to fully manage explosive threats is established.

- In Afghanistan, UNMAS has completed the transfer of responsibilities of an all-UNMAS mine action coordination centre to the Department of Mine Clearance (DMAC). In close consultations with the host country and other important stakeholders, UNMAS is currently devising a plan that would reflect both the actual completion of its core mandate in Afghanistan and also, through a possible reconfiguring of its plan, its readiness to assist the country further with specific projects. We, at UNMAS, will always try to find a way to satisfy Afghanistan's commitment to meet its obligations under the Convention.
- The road to transition incorporates training, advising, assisting, and mentoring, including in support of States compliance with the Convention. UNMAS provided expert technical advice to the government of Afghanistan in the elaboration of their extension request, deemed by States parties as “a model for all other extension requests”. This year, UNMAS extended the same support to the government of Iraq; Iraq's extension request will be considered next week in Vienna.
- In summary, looking back over 20 years of both the Convention including 20 years of UNMAS and UN Coordination, I can confirm the general assembly's recognition of the role of the United Nations in Mine Action: the UN has, indeed, contributed to rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of affected communities, and assisted affected States to develop their capacity to tend to their own needs.
- Earlier this year, Secretary-General Guterres acknowledged publicly that mine action is as key enabler for humanitarian action, sustainable development, and peace sustainment. In this context, he stated that “peace without mine action is incomplete peace”. Most recently, the special representative of the Secretary General in Iraq, Jan Kubis, stated again that mine action was a pre-requisite to pretty much all activities carried out and planned in Iraq; and he again called on the Security Council to support UNMAS in this endeavor.
- In this historic moment, when we all adhere to the vision of a world free of mines by 2025, let me assure you of UNMAS steadfast commitment to continue secure the United Nations most effective support to implement the Convention.

I thank you.