

MINUTES

MASG MEETING – OPEN SESSION

ZOOM – FRIDAY, 28 MAY 2021

1. Opening Remarks

1.1 Meeting Open. The Chair of the MASG, Mr Wolfgang Bindseil, opened the Zoom meeting at 14.00 hours (CEST) and welcomed the 100+ participants. The Chair then introduced Assistant Secretary-General Alexandre Zouev from OROLSI/DPO and invited him to address the meeting.

1.2 ASG Zouev, OLROSI. Mr Zouev, ASG for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, thanked the Chair for his introduction and said that he was pleased to attend the MASG on behalf of USG Lacroix, the Chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action. He noted that the 24th International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and United Nations Advisers had just concluded and that its theme was ‘Perseverance, Partnership and Progress’. He said that since this group last met in October 2020, UN mine action has persevered – through multiple uncertainties and challenges faced. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact – but aside from this, the scenes from Gaza have raised deep concerns among the international community and Afghanistan faces uncertainty considering the withdrawal of US troops. The UN has also seen the need for a mine action response in the South Caucasus. Mr Zouev said perseverance takes commitment from a wide range of actors – including of course the donors.

Mr Zouev pointed out that despite the challenges, progress is being made and gave the examples of Colombia, Sudan, Syria. He underlined that in multiple peacekeeping settings, mine action projects continue to train peacekeepers, provide technical advice, and respond to sightings of explosive ordnance. They ensured safe implementation of mandates, even in areas facing high explosive threats. With regards to the Mine Action Area of Responsibility, UNMAS, along with UNDP and UNICEF, have increased the incorporation of mine action into humanitarian response plans. In 2020, data collected against the UN Mine Action Strategy noted a significant drop in casualties from landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices. The data also showed progress regarding increased national and local capacities. Encouragingly, the number of women serving in leadership or technical positions in UN mine action has increased.

Looking ahead, Mr Zouev underlined the importance of four points to achieve progress;

- First, through coordination and collaboration. Close collaboration has guided UN mine action responses to crises in Gaza, the South Caucasus, Ethiopia, and Equatorial Guinea. Coordination ensured that capacities were effectively deployed, tailored to best “value add”, and that duplication was avoided. Engagement with NGOs and other relevant partners has also been ramped up through a series of informal consultations.
- Enhanced integration of mine action into overarching frameworks – for example, humanitarian response planning, and the Secretary-General’s *Action for Peacekeeping* initiative, or other agendas such as Children in Armed Conflict and the Protection of Civilians – will continue. Integration will

ensure that the role of mine action across the “triple nexus” of humanitarian, development and peace and security efforts is leveraged to accelerate results.

- The third priority relates to transparency and accountability. UNMAS, the coordinator of United Nations mine action, has launched an ambitious management reform process to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Ongoing efforts in this respect aim to increase accountability and integrate guidance from Member States and appointed auditors into policies and programming.
- Financial security is also a major aspect of the future of UN mine action. In 2020, the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in mine action received more than US\$69 million – including from many of the donors present today. Moreover, continued unearmarked contributions allowed many critical interventions, such as in Gaza the South Caucasus, and Ethiopia. The UN understands that COVID-19 has created unforeseen needs and has led to the redirection of international resources. Yet, the UN is compelled to appeal for donor’s support, which is needed now more than ever.

Mr Zouev concluded his remarks by saying that it is clear that threats from explosive ordnance are not going away. To meet these complex demands the UN will need strong partnerships – including national institutions, regional organizations, and donors. Mr Zouev thanked the donors for their ongoing support to the UN – and not just financial support, but also through their political advocacy. He wished all MASG members a fruitful meeting.

1.3 Update from the Chair. The Chair thanked Mr Zouev for his remarks and noted that many of the points he raised were on the agenda of the MASG meeting today, such as regional cooperation, gender issues and the nexus between mine action and humanitarian assistance, development and peace and security. The Chair then mentioned that he had recently represented the MASG at several on-line meetings, including a UNDP event titled ‘Beyond Square Metres Cleared – the Link between Mine Action and Development’ and an UNMAS event held in Geneva on 7 April to mark the International Day of Mine Awareness. He further mentioned a meeting in October 2020 organized by Germany involving 40 stakeholders of mine action in Bosnia Herzegovina. The Chair then outlined the agenda for the meeting and introduced the speakers.

2. Briefings: Regional Mine Action

2.1 Peru and Ecuador. Representatives from Ecuador and Peru gave a joint presentation titled ‘For a Border without Landmines’. Ambassador Ricardo Morote of Peru opened the session saying that since joining the Ottawa Convention, Peru and Ecuador have been making a great effort to demine border areas. Both countries have adopted measures based on mutual trust and best practices. Despite the negative effects caused by COVID 19, Peru is committed achieve mine free status by December 2024. When the mines are cleared, Peru stands ready to assist other countries. Finally, Ambassador Morote said that Peru appreciated the support of donors. Minister Luis Espinosa Salas of Ecuador noted that after the peace treaty was signed between the two countries in 1998, good cooperation and coordination has allowed Peru and Ecuador to work closely together. Ecuador has completed 90% of its clearance, but because of the effects of COVID will need assistance to meet their completion target of 2022.

A joint power point presentation then outlined the key statistics for both country's mine clearance efforts. Ecuador has released 90% of its affected areas leaving only 40,000 square metres remaining to be released in Zamora Chinchipe Province. The budget to complete this work by 2022 is almost US\$10 million. For Peru, an area of 369, 212 square metres is to be released in five provinces by 2024. The budget for this work over the next four years is around US\$9.5 million.

The Chair noted that the excellent cooperation between two nations formerly in conflict was remarkable. He said that it showed great ownership and responsibility. In question time, the representative of France asked about a similar budget being needed to clear quite different areas of land. Ecuador stated that there were different realities on the ground and that much of its equipment was old and outdated. Ecuador also noted that they aimed to clear all areas by 2022, so they were working in a compressed time frame. Italy noted that they were about to finish funding two projects in Ecuador and were interested hearing more about regional approaches. The APMBC ISU noted that Peru and Ecuador achieving their Article 5 obligations would help the Convention, and that the notion of 'success breeding success' would encourage other countries. He also noted that this would be a step toward achieving a mine-free southern hemisphere. In conclusion, the Chair thanked Peru and Ecuador for their interesting and substantial presentations and noted that such examples of good cooperation were sadly not so frequent.

The PPT presentation is posted on the MASG website.

2.2 South Caucasus. Mr Steinar Essén, the Head of the UNDP Mine Action Team, gave a presentation on the situation in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Mr Essén briefly outlined the background to the recent conflict and showed a map detailing which parts of Nagorno-Karabakh are currently under control of Azerbaijan or Armenia. He noted that a peace agreement has not been signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and that the situation is still tense and sensitive.

Currently in Azerbaijan, there are extensive 'border minefields' (on the old line of contact) covering an estimated length of 300 km and varying in width from three to seven km. As a result of last year's conflict, involving 44 days of intense fighting, affected areas are believed to be extensively contaminated with a range of UXO, including cluster munitions. Mr Essén showed a photo of the old line of contact near Fuzuli Town, containing a huge anti-tank ditch with defensive minefields on both sides, where mine clearance had already been undertaken to facilitate the construction of a new highway. The scope of the problem is significantly larger in Azerbaijan, but the impact of this mine and UXO contamination affects communities on both side of the conflict, as it will hinder safe and speedy reconstruction (such as power lines) and IDP settlement, it blocks access to agricultural land and water and will hinder demarcation. The current mine action actors in Azerbaijan include the NMAA and the mine action centre, ANAMA, along with the Ministries of Emergency Situations, Defence and Education. In addition to commercial mine action actors, the Turkish Army, ICRC, UNICEF and UNDP are present in Azerbaijan.

The situation in Armenia is different and mainly a legacy problem. However, there is some new contamination due to the recent conflict, including cluster munition. In Armenia, the national mine action centre (Centre for Humanitarian Demining and Expertise -CHDE) leads on mine action, supported by the Ministries of Defence, Emergency Situations, and Education. The key actors in Nagorno-Karabakh are HALO Trust, ICRC, local authorities, and Russian peacekeepers. In both

countries, the UN inter-agency needs assessment missions identified the following urgent needs; capacity development support, non-technical survey, and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE).

Mr Essén concluded by saying that mine action is a pre-condition for safe IDP return and early recovery. He noted that strong national ownership exists, but the national bodies could benefit from international support to strengthen efficiency and quality, in line with international mine action standards and sector best practice. Close stakeholder coordination is needed, and UNDP is well placed to assist with this. In question time, Netherlands noted that neither Azerbaijan, nor Armenia are members of the APMBC and asked what steps can be taken to encourage them to join the Convention. Mr Essén said that it was a challenge to promote the Conventions during conflict, but he hoped that the matter may be included in peace talks to come. The ISU APMBC noted that there are steps that can be taken to encourage non-members to join the Convention, and an opportunity exists when affected countries are seeking donor support. Often in these situations there is a stand-off where one country will not join until the other does, and even a commitment for no new use of landmines at this time would be useful. The GICHD said that they had conducted a needs assessment in April, and their findings were the same as UNDP's. The GICHD was in touch with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and their report should be finalized shortly. Finally, Mr Paul Heslop from UNMAS Afghanistan, who was joining the MASG meeting from a landmine meeting in Moscow, said that both Armenia and Azerbaijan were in attendance at the Moscow meeting. Mr Heslop said that the issue had been raised in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Protocol V and that this was a good first step.

The PPT presentation is available on request from Mr Steiner Essén at steinar.essen@undp.org

2.3 Sahel. Ms Ilene Cohn, the Acting Director UNMAS and Mr Stephen Pritchard, Chief of Operations UNMAS, gave a presentation on the situation in the Sahel Region (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and The Gambia). Ms Cohn opened by saying that explosive ordnance is creating a major challenge in the region, and that accidents continue to be regularly reported. The weak capacity to manage arms storage poses the twin risks of unintended explosions (e.g., tragedy in Bata, Equatorial Guinea) and arms diversion to illegal groups. The latter is compounded by easy access to commercially available explosives and legacy arms diversion, including notably from the breakdown of Libya in 2011. These factors have fuelled an increasingly prominent IED threat, and in Mali this year there have been three ERW incidents and 68 IED incidents up to the end of April. IEDs also continue to impact mandate delivery of UN peacekeeping operations and threaten peacekeepers lives.

Ms Cohn outlined the need for a regional approach. The lack of border controls and the cross-border criminal and terrorist networks in the region meant that tackling IEDs on a country-by-country basis is doomed to fail. Arms sales, terrorist training camps and other activities outside the region also play a role. Without strengthened, regional cohesion, international assistance efforts will form at best a patchwork of country-centric efforts each with their own incompatible terminologies, data management, and messaging. The UN Security Council has increasingly embraced a regional approach to the Sahel, with a growing number of briefings and presidential statements on the region seen in recent years. The Council has also expanded its interest to incorporate issues beyond security. At the same time, Member State focus on the threat of IEDs appears to be gaining

momentum (including *in the Arria formula, SC debate on mine action, increased references in C34 report*). Just last week, the Security Council met to discuss the G5/Sahel, with some members making explicit references to the IED threat. This augurs well for political support to a regional approach to explosive threats in the Sahel. Ms Cohn concluded by saying that a starting point for mine action partners active in the region is information sharing and prioritization.

Mr Pritchard then gave some details of mine action operations in the region. He started by thanking the following civil society partners for contributing toward the briefing: Small Arms Survey, Handicap International, Mines Advisory Group, Humanity & Inclusion, Norwegian People's Aid, and also to UN partners: ODA, DPO (DDR, SSR and OROLSI), UNDP, UNICEF, UNOPS and UNIDIR. Mr Pritchard said the conflict systems across and beyond the Sahel are characterized by the use of improvised explosive devices and conventional landmines, denigrating the ability of governments to provide security, raise tax revenues as well as posing a safety threat to civilians and aid workers. The know-how and components are spreading between conflict systems such as the Liptaka Gourma and Lake Chad Basin regions. Explosives and components are sourced from three main origins: the commercial market (e.g. Ammonium Nitrate explosive for rare metal extraction), diversion from legitimate security providers (e.g. theft, capture or corruption), and legacy contamination (e.g. existing minefields or abandoned stockpiles). The mine action sector has a role to play, not only with risk education, but also Weapons and Ammunition Management (WAM), though it must adapt its approaches to rely more on community/local institution delivery, since access for foreigners is difficult across the region. The UN and international actors need to address information cohesion of mine action and weapons and ammunition management (WAM) across the Sahel and beyond, as these threats flow between different areas and respect no national boundaries.

The Chair thanked the speakers for their presentations. In question time, Ambassador Toscano, Director GICHD, informed participants that some time ago the GICHD had created a French-language regional cooperation programme. This group meets in the margins of the NDM-UN and will also hold a meeting this October dedicated to the Sahel. The issue of IEDs, EORE and ammunition management will be on the agenda. The GICHD will keep partners informed about the details of the meeting.

The PPT presentation is posted on the MASG website.

2.4 Afghanistan. Mr Paul Heslop, Programme Manager UNMAS Afghanistan, gave a detailed briefing on the current situation in Afghanistan. He started by saying that mine action had been a success story in Afghanistan over the past 30 years. The number of civilian casualties caused by pre-2001 contamination had dropped dramatically. The Afghan Government had effective ownership of the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan and thousands of Afghans are employed in the sector. However, the number of civilian casualties due to post-2001 contamination has risen sharply, mainly due to IEDs. The current challenges are 1) landmines and IEDs, 2) access and security, 3) the upcoming US troop withdrawal and peace process, 4) supporting safe return and humanitarian delivery and 5) funding.

Mr Heslop then gave an assessment of the likely scenarios that may play out after the US withdrawal and referred to a paper titled 'Conflict Sensitivity in UNMAS Afghanistan Programming'. The biggest challenge for mine action operators will be access to contested areas, and Mr Heslop outlined the current UNMAS negotiation approach with the Taliban and other groups. Surveys, EORE and

marking will continue to be important activities to assist urgent humanitarian delivery during the withdrawal phase.

The current APMBBC Article 5 deadline for Afghanistan is 2023. The Government is currently preparing a request for a seven-year extension – until 2030. Mr Heslop noted that if there had not been new conflict in 2001, Afghanistan would now be clear of all the 1980's Soviet-era landmines. He then outlined the annual funding needs for Afghanistan to achieve a 2030 clearance deadline. This included a total figure of \$200 million to clear coalition firing ranges, which should not come from humanitarian funding. In conclusion, Mr Heslop asked donors what their plans were for mine action in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal. Germany responded by stating that they had no changes in their project schedule at this stage. The US said that they intended to continue to provide support going forward at the same level of US\$20 million per year. There were some practical implications, such as the need for safe operating space for mine action operators, and that funding could not be provided for work in areas controlled by organizations subject to US sanctions. Mr Laurence from UNICEF highlighted that half of the child EOD casualties in the world are in Afghanistan and that children bear the brunt of the threat of IEDs and ERW. UNICEF had continued with EORE campaigns and have recently reached over 700,000 people remotely.

A copy of the general PPT and another presentation on the clearance of firing ranges in Afghanistan are available on the MASG website. The paper on 'Conflict Sensitivity in UNMAS Afghanistan Programming' is available on request from Mr Paul Heslop at heslop@un.org.

3. Briefings: Thematic Updates

3.1 COVID Impact. A joint presentation on the impact of COVID 19 on mine action was given by Mr Darren Cormack (Drumlanrig Group), Mr Amir Omeragic (UNOPS) and Ambassador Stefano Toscano (GICHD). Mr Cormack opened by saying that he was taking a broad view of the situation, as he was speaking on behalf of the Drumlanrig Group, which is an informal grouping of six mine action operators, currently working in 30 areas. He said that COVID made life worse for the poorest of the 60 million people worldwide affected by landmines and ERW. The impact of the pandemic included the following: 1) the fear of the virus spreading led to the closure of some IDP camps, forcing residents to return to mine-affected areas, 2) migrant labourers forced to return home due to lockdowns having to transit through affected areas, and 3) loss of livelihoods forcing people to try and cultivate ERW-contaminated land. Mine action is essential to the triple nexus approach (saves lives, contributes to peace, and facilitates development) and the pandemic does not change this, it only adds to the urgency of mine action efforts. Mr Cormack then ran through some operational considerations that were either immediate or had longer term implications, involving funding, budgeting, service delivery and ways of working. Finally, he then offered some recommendations to the MASG. These included the need for continued donor commitment, flexibility, sustainability, and adaptability.

Mr Omeragic, from UNOPS, noted how technology had enabled global meetings like this one, but that it still required human commitment to make a difference in the world. He then went on to describe the measures that UNOPS had taken to address the effects of COVID on the projects that they manage (which is 18 UNMAS field programmes involving 100 contracts/grants representing

\$200 million of mine action activities). He stressed the need for early engagement and flexibility with partners, and the desire to avoid outright terminations of staff and loss of capacity that would ultimately cost more to stand up later. Their policy involved de-scoping projects, stand-downs, suspending activities and where necessary termination. Overall, UNOPS undertook continuous cost-benefit analyses and had to change the scope of works to 22% of their projects, 5% were stood down and 8% were temporarily suspended.

Finally, Ambassador Toscano spoke about the opportunities and challenges for remote delivery. He said that the pandemic has brought into sharp focus the need for mine action but has highlighted that the sector will need to keep innovating and strengthening national capacities. Ambassador Toscano also stressed the need for trust between partners and noted that the GICHD enjoyed good relations with national authorities that had been built up over the years. A learning curve exists with new technology involving hardware as well as software. Delivering remote training involved new challenges which were different to face-to-face situations. The GICHD had worked with partners to determine which topics could be trained remotely. Remote instruction allowed for more people to be trained, but we cannot rely on it entirely. An example of successful remote training was a technical survey course for Afghanistan, which was aided by setting up a dedicated space in the GICHD for the training and the use of simulators. Lessons learned included the need to reduce the length of lessons, strive to make the training interactive and to use different instructors. For another course on ammunition management for Mauritania, it was agreed that some work could be done remotely, but other topics had to be done in person. This was because some topics were sensitive, the quality of technical advice is better with on-site visits and formal discussions, and it is easier to capture nuances when in-person.

The Chair thanked all speakers for their interesting perspectives and a copy of the PPT presentation is available on the MASG website.

3.2 Update on Country Profiles – The Monitor. Mr Hector Guerra of the Land Mine Monitor gave an update on the work of the Monitor. Mr Guerra started by thanking the donors to the Monitor, which has been reporting on the global landmine and cluster munition problems and solutions since 1999 and 2010 respectively. The Monitor reports on the universalization and implementation of the Mine Ban Convention and the Cluster Munitions Convention, and incorporates gender and diversity aspects, as well victims and survivors. It has a network of in-country researchers, including mine/ERW, survivors covering at least 25 countries and region (as of 2021) and three editorial teams and features two annual reports, online country profiles and maps. The objectives of the Monitor are to 1) provide a global overview of the international community's response to the landmine, cluster munition and ERW problem, 2) act as a reliable one-stop hub of latest developments in mine action, 3) promote discussion on landmine, cluster munition and ERW issues, 4) complement transparency reporting and 5) contribute to efforts toward a mine and cluster munition free world. In 2019, the Monitor undertook risk education thematic reporting for the first time since 2008. In 2020, the Monitor produced more than 250 country profiles, covering ban policy, impact, and support for mine action. Finally, Mr Guerra advised that a new website for the Monitor would be ready in the final quarter of 2021.

A copy of the PPT is available on the MASG website.

3.3 Impact of Mine Action on Development Outcomes. Mr George Bowles from Itad gave an update on the work they had been doing on behalf of the UK aid, looking at the impact of mine action on development outcomes. Mr Bowles said that he would provide some insights from an on-going geospatial study to better understand links between mine action and longer-term development outcomes in Afghanistan. The study is funded by the UK's FCDO as part of its Global Mine Action Programme 2 (GMAP2). Itad have partnered with AidData to conduct the study, with support provided by the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) in Afghanistan. Geospatial impact evaluation (GIE) is an innovative approach for studying causal impacts of development interventions, utilizing data about interventions (i.e. land release) plus available sources of historical outcome data, such as remotely sensed satellite data and large-scale surveys. One of the data sources of the study is 'Night Time Lights', which uses before and after satellite photos of areas that have been demined, to gauge the level of development by measuring the additional amount of lighting after demining. This is used with other data to assess the impact of releasing land on economic development, population growth, trust in government, self-reported well-being, and market access.

The Itad study found strong evidence of a causal link between clearance of hazardous areas in Afghanistan and economic development. The greatest economic gains arose from those areas that were least developed at the time of clearance. The impact had been stronger with programmes implemented after 2008. The next phases will continue to explore the impact of clearance on development outcomes by utilizing additional data sources and examine links between mine action and community resilience. A remote workshop is being held on 15 June 2021 to reflect on the study in more depth, and MASG members were invited to participate in the meeting.

A copy of the PPT presentation is posted on the MASG website.

3.4 Update on Gaza situation. Mr Steve Pritchard from UNMAS thanked UNICEF for freeing up their section on the agenda, in order for him to give a short update on the situation in Gaza. He said that in response to the recent intense escalation of violence between Hamas and Israel, UNMAS and partners present in the Gaza strip are conducting an emergency mine action response. UNMAS and UNICEF jointly delivered emergency risk education including through text messaging, and UNMAS assessed dozens of UN sites (e.g. UNWRA schools) for explosive hazards, in order to support a return to normal UN relief efforts for the Palestinian people. The destruction of properties and creation of explosive hazards from bombing, the result of around 4,000 strikes half of which were by air, has created the need to address contamination for both humanitarian and reconstruction purposes. After a similar escalation of violence in 2014, UNMAS oversaw the clearance of over a hundred deep buried bombs. This allowed reconstruction, prevented catastrophic explosions in the densely populated area, and ensured that the explosive fill of those weapons was destroyed rather than repurposed. Mr Pritchard concluded by saying that UNMAS needed US\$4 million over the next two years, and he thanked the US and Japan for engaging in early discussions with UNMAS on the emergency response to the recent escalation.

4. Update from Observers

4.1 JMU CISR. Ms Susanne Fiederlein, the Acting Director of CISR gave a short update. She highlighted that the Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction has now been published for 25

years and would celebrate this milestone with a double issue this July. In addition, CISR was starting a project called 'CISR Exchange', which would consist of recorded video conversations and guests will include Journal authors, subject-matter experts, and senior managers. The CISR PPT presentation has been posted on the MASG website.

4.2 OAS. Mr Carl Case, the Senior Adviser on Mine Action at the OAS, commented on the positive efforts of Ecuador and Peru regarding cross-border mine action, and mentioned that they have requested assistance from the OAS. He noted that the OAS, EU and ISU APMBC had organized a meeting in February 2021 to promote a mine-free Southern Hemisphere, and to look at ways to assist Peru meet its Article 5 target of 2022 and Ecuador 2024. Mr Case noted that donors, like the EU, have requested proposals from both countries. The OAS plans to provide support in the form of equipment, training, and quality management over the next two years.

4.3 GICHD. The Director of the GICHD, Ambassador Stefano Toscano, provided a written update on the work of the GICHD covering ammunition management, Iraq, and Ukraine. The update has been posted on the MASG website.

4.4 Mine Action Net. The Fenix organization briefed at the previous MASG meeting, and they had provided a written update on the Mine Action Net tool, that allows easy searching of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). Two updates have been posted on the MASG website.

4.5 ITF Enhancing Human Security. Ambassador Tomaz Lovrencic, Director of the ITF, said that he believed what was not prominent enough in mine action was recognition of achievements. He felt the sector needed to acknowledge the work of deminers in the field and the overall achievements made in affected countries, so that donors could feed good news back into their governments and budgets. This was particularly important given all the competing demands at present. He noted that Sarajevo was close to being mine free 26 years after the war, thanks in a large part to the support of the USA. He said the ITF hoped to hold an event in Sarajevo to mark this milestone. He also noted that the 'country coalition' model between Germany and Bosnia Herzegovina was highly successful and felt this should be expanded to other areas. Ambassador Lovrencic agreed that mine action supported the nexus between humanitarian support, peace operations and development.

4.6 UNDP. Mr Luca Renda, Team Leader Recovery Solutions, UNDP advised that UNDP was undertaking a global project with the GICHD. The project was titled 'Beyond Square Metres' and will provide evidence of the benefits of mine action on development. The project will be spread over two years and has been funded by Germany. The case studies in 2021 will be Bosnia Herzegovina, Somalia and Ukraine, South Sudan, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Mr Renda also announced that Mr Steinar Essén has recently been appointed the new Head of the UNDP Mine Action Team.

5. Closing Remarks and Next Meeting.

5.1 Closing Remarks. The Chair said that the next meeting of the MASG will take place in October 2021. He hoped that the meeting could be held in person in New York, but he would monitor the situation with regards to COVID 19 and keep members informed about plans for the meeting. If any member had suggestions for the next meeting, they should send an email to the Secretariat. The

Chair thanked the USA for their ongoing support of the MASG by funding the Secretariat post for another year. Finally, the Chair thanked all the presenters for their contribution to a very informative meeting.

5.2 Meeting Close. The meeting closed at 13.15 hours CEST.

Annex A: Donor Updates, MASG Meeting 28 May 2021

(Note. These updates were given in the Closed Session of the MASG meeting, but they are annexed to these minutes for information)

1.1 Australia. The representative of Australia noted that Australia had provided AUD\$9.5 million for hazard reduction and victim assistance in the calendar year 2020. Australia continued to support global mine action through the GICHD, UNMAS, UNDP and ICBL-CMC. Support was provided for EORE and clearance activities in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, and Syria. Australia has an ongoing commitment to the Clearing for Results programme in Cambodia. The high-quality work undertaken by UNMAS in Afghanistan was recognized, particularly in mainstreaming gender considerations, and this financial support has been extended to the end of 2022. Australia aided Iraq and Syria (through UNMAS) and this support would extend to the end of June 2022. The Australian Defence Force continues to aid Pacific nations in safely disposing of explosive remnants of war, as well as providing education and training to enhance capability. Australian funding reduced in 2021 due to COVID 19, but funding levels are nearing pre-COVID levels in the Australian FY 2021/22. Australia considers clearing of mines and IEDs to be a humanitarian and sustainable development imperative for the successful distribution of aid, safe return home of thousands of displaced people and the release of land back to local communities for productive uses. Australia also supports efforts by states parties to pursue work on stockpile management and encourages cooperation in capacity building and establishing best practice.

1.2 Belgium. In 2020 Belgium had provided EUR 4 million for mine action, which was the same level as 2019. The funding went to ICRC and UNMAS for programmes in Syria and Iraq. Belgium also supported the HALO Trust in Iraq and the NGO APOPO.

1.3 Denmark. The representative of Denmark said they provided a core contribution to UNMAS and that the current programme covering 2017 to 2021 had been extended into 2022. Denmark will review its mine action funding in 2022. Denmark understands the high level of demand placed on UNMAS, while they also fund various other local activities and programmes. Denmark supports a focus on UN SC Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

1.4 Estonia. The representative of Estonia said that in 2020 they had contributed funding for Iraq and Syria through UNMAS.

1.5 European Union. The EU representative said they were currently reflecting on possibilities for future funding and that a decision would be made shortly about ongoing assistance to the ISU APMBC.

1.6 France. The representative of France said that they continued to support mine action during 2019 and 2020, but it had been at a slower pace due to COVID 19. Around EUR 6 million had been provided each year to programmes in the Middle East, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Mali, Chad, and Mauritania. France had supported Iraq and Gaza through UNMAS. France supported two regional demining schools in Lebanon and Benin and provided funding to NPA in Ukraine.

1.7 Finland. Finland started a new 5-year funding round on 1 January 2021, and it will run until 2025. Prior to this new programme, Finland had conducted a review of its mine action funding which found no major changes to Finnish HMA policies were needed, because the current approach was assessed as effective, efficient, and relevant. For Finland, humanitarian mine action is an important humanitarian effort, but also part of the wider security, stability, and development agenda. With a focus on fragile states, projects continued in the same countries as before: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, and Ukraine. Despite the pandemic, the MFA managed to secure an increase to Finnish HMA funding, which now comprises EUR 15 million for the 5-year programme (EUR 3 million/year). The implementing organizations that Finland partners with are UNMAS, the ICRC and several international civil society organizations (the HALO Trust, DDG, MAG and the GICHD). Finland favors an approach that combines several different pillars of mine action.

1.8 Germany. Germany provided EUR 49.2 million for humanitarian mine action in 2020. Funding was granted to the priority countries included in the German Mine Action Strategy, and additionally for mine action in Libya, Nigeria, and Yemen. In 2021, Germany will revise its “Humanitarian Mine Action Strategy within the framework of Federal Governance humanitarian assistance”. Germany will extend the strategy into 2022-2023. In collaboration with the GICHD, Germany will revise its list of priority countries. Germany foresees to adapt project documents to include additional requirements, such as inclusion (Gender/Age/Disability), which is particularly important in project management.

1.9 Ireland. Ireland has a three-year funding agreement with HALO Trust covering 2018 to 2020, and this has just been extended by one year. The agreement covers five countries – Afghanistan, Colombia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe. A new programme for HALO Trust will be discussed in mid-2021. The funding level for 2021 was EUR 2 million, which was the same as the previous three years. Ireland is flexible with its aid programme and can shift money as required. A separate Irish mine action programme is run by the Embassy in Hanoi, and this provides funding for work in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

1.10 Italy. A dedicated national trust fund for Humanitarian Demining was set up by Italian law in 2001, allowing for the allocation of resources to mine action projects relating to anti-personnel landmines and explosive remnants of war. Since then, Italy has invested more than EUR 62 million in mine action programmes, with a particular focus on clearance, risk education and assistance to victims. In 2021, Italy increased its annual contribution to EUR 8.5 million. Italy supports programmes in crisis areas, such as Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Italy also supports initiatives in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Jordan, Sudan, Colombia, and Palestine, and is planning to support the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Centre (ARMAC). The main beneficiaries to be included in 2021 planning will most probably be Somalia, Mali, Niger, Syria, and Iraq. The main partners are UNMAS, ICRC, WHO and UNDP. The Italian Army has provided training and capacity building to Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. Italy also funds the GICHD, the APMBC and CCM ISU’s and Geneva Call.

Italy continues to adopt a holistic approach, paying attention not only to the necessary mine clearance activities, but also to the social and long-term dimension, through a growing commitment to risk education and assistance to survivors, both in terms of health assistance and socio-economic integration.

1.11 Japan. During the 12-month period April 2020 to March 2021, Japan provided approximately US\$39 million to 21 countries and regions. In March, Japan provided over US\$4 million through UNMAS for six countries and regions, including Gaza. The policy of Japan is threefold; 1) to continue support to seriously affected countries, 2) to promote south-south and regional approaches, and 3) to provide support to mine victims.

1.12 Netherlands. The representative of the Netherlands said that they had started a new mine action funding programme last year through their traditional partners, and despite COVID it stayed at EUR 15 million in 2020. Netherlands also provided EUR 3 million through UNMAS for Afghanistan and Iraq. Netherlands had looked at funding HALO Trust in Nagorno Karabakh, but this was not possible for various reasons, so they were looking at other options. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan had approached Netherlands for funds, but they would prefer to fund through a UN agency e.g. UNDP. Netherlands are currently Chair of the APMBC and they want to ensure that the Convention is front and centre of their work. Finally, Netherlands encouraged other donors to get countries in the Caucuses to join the APMBC.

1.13 Slovenia. The representative of Slovenia reminded the meeting that Slovenia has a long history of supporting mine action. Slovenia hosts the International Trust Fund – Enhancing Human Security (ITF) and they will continue to support it in the future.

1.14 Sweden. The representative of Sweden said that they had provided EUR 9 million for mine action in 2020 and had allocated a similar level for 2021. The multi-annual support went primarily to DRC/DDG, MAG and UNMAS (for Iraq) for field operations, and core support was provided to the GICHD. Sweden had also recently enhanced the collaboration between the Swedish EOD and Demining Centre (SWEDEC) and the Ukrainian government authorities involved in implementing the newly amended Mine Action Law in Ukraine.

1.15 Switzerland. In 2020, Switzerland invested CHF 17 million in the mine action area. These resources were spent to clear mines, assist victims, raise awareness about the risks posed by mines, cluster munition remnants and explosive remnants of war, strengthen local capacities, as well as promote the respect of international commitments such as the ones against the use of anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. Projects were supported in the following contexts: Colombia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Georgia, Myanmar, Kosovo and Syria. Experts were deployed to the following contexts: Mali, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Western Sahara. Switzerland's engagement is based on its latest [Mine Action Strategy](#), which covers the period 2016-2022.

1.16 United Kingdom. The representative of the UK said that due to an overall reduction in the aid budget, the allocation to mine action had been cut by 50% and the amount for the Global Mine Action Programme 2 in 2021/22 is £17 million. This has led to some difficult discussion with delivery partners. The UK remain committed to evidence-based research and all results will be shared with other donors. The UK will fund the next steps of its research in Afghanistan but would be pleased to

hear from any MASG member interested in co-funding research in another country. The UK is also looking at innovative funding mechanisms, such as impact bonds, public-private partnerships, and front-loaded funding mechanisms. This work will be briefed at the June Intersessional meeting of the APMBC.

1.17 United States. The representative of the US said that with the Biden administration continuing to take shape as more and more of its political leaders are confirmed by the Senate, they are working to address as many policy issues as quickly as possible, but the US do not yet have clear answers on everything. A review is currently underway of the US landmine policy, and this may lead to a roll back of the 2020 policy. The request for the next annual budget for conventional weapons destruction is US\$255 million – the largest amount ever. With regards to Afghanistan, the US does not intend to alter its commitment after the US troop withdrawal scheduled for September 2021. The US has budgeted US\$20 million for Afghanistan in 2022 – which is the same level as past years. The delivery is dependent on there being continued safe space for mine action operators to operate. For Gaza, the US has provided an emergency grant of US\$500,000 through UNMAS. The US encouraged other donors to assist in Gaza. Secretary of State Blinken has expressed strong support for funding demining in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and the United States does intend to contribute. That said, Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s unwillingness to reach a compromise on access for international humanitarian organizations is extremely unfortunate, and until the parties can reach agreement on such basic principles, the US remain at a standstill. Finally, the US representative re-affirmed ongoing US commitment to CWD around the globe.

End – Final Version