

UNMAS Director OiC Statement for UNDP Development Dialogues: “Beyond the Square Meters Cleared: Mine Action and Development”

8 - 9:30 am (NY time) 18 March

Introduction

Good morning/ afternoon, Your Royal Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to take part in this panel alongside formidable advocates and valuable partners in mine action. I particularly thank UNDP for initiating and organizing this event, profiling mine action in Fragility Month, and getting the International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance in mine action, officially on the 4th of April, off to an early start!

The partnership between UNDP and UNMAS is crucial one, demonstrated recently by our joined up approach to assessment missions in response to the outbreak of conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh.

I have been invited to address **land release and prioritization**. Explosive ordnance contamination continues to pose a threat to development in conflict-affected countries. Removing the threat is often a necessary precursor to development.

“**Land release**” is the result of a process of “treating” land that has been recorded as potentially contaminated by explosive ordnance. Treatment may include technical and non-technical survey and clearance. Clearance is extremely time-consuming and somewhat expensive. Prioritization based on explicit criteria determined by national authorities is critical.

In contexts where humanitarian, development and security demands are high, **mine action programmes are one of many compelling bidders for scarce resources** . The **global pandemic** has exacerbated this scarcity.

Consequently, the criteria for prioritization must be principled, nationally-owned, cost-effective, data-driven and responsive to local communities.

The **first** consideration in prioritization of which land to focus on, and how to treat it is **the humanitarian principle** of saving lives and alleviating suffering. In practical terms, this means first considering the areas potentially most dangerous to civilians.

Second, as set out in the UN's multi-year Mine Action Strategy, we support national authorities to prioritise based on their developmental priorities. **Building national capacity** to ensure a sustainable and effective response in the long-term is the foundation of forward planning. This is of course an area of expertise for UNDP. In recent consultations UNMAS hosted with UNDP, UNICEF and non-governmental providers on this topic we identified some criteria for successful national capacity development, including:

- National political will, including from the high-levels of government
- Capacity and commitment to Security Sector Reform
- National budget allocations to mine action, and
- National coordination mechanisms, allowing for regular dialogue among national and international and, sometimes regional, stakeholders.

National governments in post-conflict settings are encouraged to ensure mine action is reflected in **national and sub-national development plans**; to ensure that contamination does not create an un-anticipated hurdle to a development project. If the project cannot avoid land that is potentially contaminated, funds associated with the project provide another source of funding for removing contamination.

Third, prioritized land should be released through the most economical means possible while complying with international mine action standards.

Given the expense and time required for clearance, countries should also maximise the use of **non-technical survey**. In simple terms, non-technical survey refers to all the actions carried out for more accurately defining explosive ordnance contamination. This includes desk assessments, analysis of historical records and other information-gathering and analysis processes, as well as physical visits to field locations. For example, a non-technical survey could identify areas included in a data-base which are actually being heavily cultivated by the local community and are obviously not posing a threat.

As non-technical survey is much less expensive than clearance, this frees up resources to focus on the high priority areas. In some contexts, marking and fencing has been an effective interim solution, saving lives while resources are generated for clearance.

Fourth, prioritization should respond to **local communities**. **We must seek out and listen to** their priorities, which may be driven by how they obtain fuel or water, sustain livelihoods, access health care or walk to school. The priorities of women, girls, boys and men, including those with disabilities, in a given community may vary and must be understood and addressed with clarity.

Fifth, consistent with the **Secretary General's Data Strategy**, the smart use and analysis of data should inform prioritization. Data on where and when people are being killed or injured allows mine action actors to address **"killing zones"**. In the post-Taliban period in Afghanistan, UNMAS analysis identified that 80% of the casualties happened in just over 100 minefields - prioritizing these led to a large drop in casualties. Data should then be used to identify the **critical infrastructure that is being blocked** by contamination. In **South Sudan**, one of the major blockages to economic development were mined roads; clearing these roads was transformational in enabling and accelerating trade development. **All goods that come into the capital city of Juba now arrive on demined roads.**

Mine action data can also provide vital information about areas that are suspected to be contaminated, to **avoid large infrastructure projects being planned for these very sites**. It is important that development actors consider potential contamination and reach out to mine action centres as part of their planning processes in post-conflict settings. Failing to consider, or budget for, mine action at an early stage of development projects can lead to unnecessary delays and expense.

And finally, translating contamination data into priorities requires us to be **forward-looking**, bearing in mind likely trends such as urbanization and the growth of specific industries (such as tourism) in the post-conflict phase.

This was successfully achieved in Afghanistan, where the centre of Kabul was prioritized for clearance, anticipating the **rapid increase in the population** in the capital city as refugees and displaced people returned or arrived in the city in response to the improved economic opportunities.

Conclusion

Mine action is a critical enabler to development in post-conflict settings. Prioritisation of land to release should be principled, nationally-owned, economical, responsive to the specific needs of communities, data-driven and forward-looking.

Thank you.