

We're delighted to join you today from Erbil and would like to start by expressing our appreciation to UNMAS Director Agnès Marcaillou for inviting us to speak on counter-IED efforts in Iraq. We also look forward to the comments of Mr. Lacrois, the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Keeping on broader efforts to address the IED problem and we warmly welcome Ms. Dathan's valuable perspectives on the harm that is being caused to civilians by explosive weapons.

We have three key messages we would like to share this afternoon.

First, the type of IED threat we are seeing in Iraq is unprecedented and has required an unprecedented effort which UNMAS is coordinating on behalf of the international community.

Second, UNMAS' role is pivotal for accomplishing everything the international community is committed to in Iraq. Unless newly liberated areas are cleared, and cleared quickly, millions of displaced civilians cannot go home, stabilization cannot advance, reconstruction will be stalled, reconciliation will falter and the military gains which have been made against ISIL in Iraq, which have been supported by nearly the entire international community, will be at risk.

Third, UNMAS' leadership of the counter-IED effort in Iraq is exemplary and represents a model for what can, and needs to be done in other countries with extremely high levels of contamination by complex IEDs.

Please allow us to share the context in Iraq. A shocking number of IEDs have been used and left behind by ISIL in the cities that were formerly under their control. IEDs have been found hidden in people's homes, in schools, in hospitals, along highways and bridges, and at water stations and sewage plants.

There are IED problems in every one of the more than 30 cities which have been liberated in the past two years. But the problems in Mosul are of a scale we have seen in very few places. Early assessments suggest that there is extensive explosive contamination in one-third to possibly half of the heavily damaged neighbourhoods in western Mosul. Bomb making facilities have been uncovered in several sites and there are very sophisticated victim-operated IEDs buried and embedded throughout the city. UNMAS assessment teams have been on the ground from the day Mosul was declared safe working as quickly as they can to address these problems. Teams have been identifying the scope and scale of the explosive threat, conducting specialized surveys, marking areas, undertaking high risk search, clearing areas and educating people about risks. Thank goodness for this because without this support, families cannot return to

their homes, stabilization would be stalled and no reconstruction could take place.

To bring this point alive, we would like to share with you concrete examples of UNMAS' exceptional engagement.

As soon as western Mosul was liberated in July, UNMAS teams rushed in to assess the city's largest hospital complex which provided virtually all specialized medical services in the city and was the centre of advanced training for thousands of medical personnel. Early in its occupation, ISIL took over the hospital and then used it as their headquarters for western Mosul. Because the hospital was the headquarters of ISIL, it was targeted by anti-ISIL forces and suffered severe infrastructure damage. Re-establishing health services in the facility was identified as a tier one priority by the Government. Because of this, UNMAS moved very quickly to assess the complex and clear it. To date, UNMAS has found over 1,500 explosive hazards. I visited this facility just last week, and the variety of explosive hazards, from improvised hand grenades to missiles and suicide belts, was incredible—in fact scary. Because UNMAS was able to move so quickly and methodically, the Ministry of Health, with support from UNDP's Stabilization Facility has been able to already rehabilitate and furnish the maternity section, burns unit, X-ray unit and the fertility centre within the complex.

Another example I would like to share is the High Court, also in western Mosul. Immediately after liberation, the government identified the Court as a tier one priority. UNMAS teams were there within days, scoping, assessing, marking and clearing. These teams found large stockpiles of unexploded ordnance, aerial-delivered improvised munitions, and IEDs and their components. More than forty suicide belts and vests were also located, one of which was clearly for a child being too small to be used by an adult. Because UNMAS was able to clear the site in record time, UNDP was able to rehabilitate the building. The High Court is functioning now, and is a powerful symbol of the return of justice to a city that only weeks earlier had been occupied by ISIL.

The impact of UNMAS' counter-IED efforts is enormous. In eastern Mosul, UNMAS cleared IEDs from the Al Qasoor water treatment plant, allowing UNDP to rehabilitate the facility, again in record time. This plant is the cornerstone of Mosul's entire water system in the eastern sector. More than 300,000 people in 34 districts in eastern Mosul are now receiving water from this plant. Before this was done, all of these people were receiving water from water trucks provided by humanitarian agencies at very high cost. By repairing the plant quickly, the UN was able to rapidly transition from a humanitarian intervention to a stabilization one; this improved services and saved money and could not have been done without UNMAS' lightning support.

In Qayarah, south of Mosul, UNMAS teams have cleared numerous schools including one which was surrounded by a defensive line of IEDs. In another school, IEDs were removed from the gate, from storeroom and from the main administrative office.

In Fallujah, UNMAS teams assessed, surveyed and cleared the Azrakiyah water treatment plant which UNDP then immediately rehabilitated and which now provides clean water to more than 250,000 people, 60% of the entire city. UNMAS teams also assessed, surveyed and cleared the Fallujah General Hospital, which now serves 10,000 patients monthly. UNMAS also found and cleared 30 complex IEDs on the “New Bridge” in Fallujah. Thousands of commercial and private vehicles now cross this bridge which is the only connection between Baghdad and Anbar Province every single day.

Every single one of the more than 1,200 stabilization projects currently being implemented in 23 newly liberated cities in Iraq has to be first cleared by a counter-IED team. Every one.

Highly skilled civilian operators are required to deal with the highly complex IEDs left behind by ISIL. In every liberated city there are massive, enormous piles of contaminated rubble which require specialised clearance skillsets and assets. Operators of this calibre are in short supply but UNMAS is working with

the Government of Iraq to register highly skilled operators and bring them into Iraq. At the same time, UNMAS is also building the capacity of mine action authorities and the local police who are involved in explosive hazard management.

The stabilization effort in Iraq is one of the largest stabilization challenges the UN has ever faced. The work that UNMAS is doing is the indispensable foundation for all stabilization, all returns, and all reconstruction in Iraq. On behalf of all of us working in Iraq, we would like to appreciate, celebrate, praise and commend UNMAS and the heroic work of the explosive hazard mitigation teams. We cannot urge Member States more strongly to contribute the significant resources required to support this work. This is money well spent, on an issue that matters in every way to a part of the UN that is performing exceptionally at the very highest international standards.