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**‘Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Threat Mitigation: Lessons
Learned from Iraq’ Side Event**

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Statement Structure – for your information

The problem

The solution – UNMAS (operational and policy)

Lessons Learned:

- Scale and complexity
- Rapid, civilian response
- Prioritisation
- Requirement for Standards
- High operating costs

Conclusion

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

(The problem)

Our distinguished panellists have made a strong case that IED contamination in Iraq today is a significant problem posing an immediate threat to the lives of thousands of forcibly displaced Iraqis who want to return home and to a normal life. Children want to go back to school, women and men want to rebuild their businesses and enjoy stability, progress and prosperity in their communities and cities again.

(The solution – UNMAS)

In 2015, SRSG Kubiš called on UNMAS to deploy “in force” to Iraq to assist with emergency clearance of explosive remnants of war in liberated areas, to support stabilization, enable

humanitarian assistance and facilitate the return of the displaced.

UNMAS very quickly began working in Baghdad and Erbil, advising on and coordinating mine action priorities and national and regional authorities, the international community, colleagues of the UN system and private demining companies. Since it started surveys and assessments of the actual nature and magnitude of the contamination, and worked on appropriate programming, many valuable lessons have been learned. I would like to share just a few of those with you today.

***Lessons Learned:
Scale and complexity***

Very quickly, UNMAS came to the confirmation that the scale and complexity of explosive hazard contamination in retaken areas in Iraq is unlike any faced by the mine action sector to date; not surprisingly we also concluded that the threat mitigation management required far exceeds existing national capacity. We also noted that in Iraq, like in other countries suffering from similar violence, when the international community does not respond rapidly and effectively to explosive hazard contamination, civilians take matters into their own hands and attempt to defuse ERW and IEDs themselves, despite their lack of technical training or equipment. The inevitable and tragic outcome is that many lose their lives; in Ramadi, close to 200

people have been killed by explosive hazards since its liberation, many of whom were returnees trying to dispose of explosives found in their homes. Risk education programmes are an essential feature of these threat mitigating activities, as recognised by Member States in the General Assembly resolution on Countering the Threat of IEDs¹ adopted in 2015. It is vital that - this year - Member States also recognise the critical requirement for clearance as part of IED threat mitigation strategies.

Lesson learnt: Urban and residential IED clearance is very complex but not an impossible task: it is a function of availability of resources, therefore teams. The same applies to working together with local communities, in particular women, to carry out vast risk education campaigns. When the international community invests in fast humanitarian deployments and stabilization in highly IED contaminated areas, pledges of support must be very quickly converted into actual funding and other contributions for contracts and deployments to be processed in a timely manner.

***Lessons Learned:
Rapid, civilian response***

Second, the response is multi-fold. UNMAS advocated an extensive and integrated civilian emergency survey and clearance

¹ 12. *Encourages* States and relevant international and regional organizations and non-governmental organizations to continue to build upon existing awareness and risk education campaigns regarding the urgent threat of improvised explosive devices;

capacity, coupled with a significant context-specific risk education and capacity enhancement programme. In dynamic contexts like Iraq, those with the requisite expertise are the security forces which are fully engaged on the front lines. A trained and well-managed civilian entity must be prepared and deployed to enable the delivery of humanitarian aid and initial stabilization.

UNMAS partners with Iraqi authorities to identify the right beneficiaries of training; Meanwhile, IED threat mitigation training for local police and risk education management training with national authorities will build Iraqi capacities to mitigate the threat of explosive hazards and help stabilize retaken areas.

***Lessons Learned:
Prioritisation***

Thirdly, UNMAS continues to stress that the planning and prioritization of emergency clearance must be coordinated with national authorities, taking into account the Government of Iraq's stabilization plan, as well as humanitarian priorities. Prioritization shall also take into account the scale of contamination in specific areas, so that priority areas that can be cleared rapidly are addressed first. Since April 2016, emergency response teams have surveyed and cleared 188 priority sites in Ramadi, Falluja and Karma, removing more than 1,800 explosive hazards to enable commencement of stabilization efforts.

In one recent case, UNMAS assessed the new bridge which spans the Euphrates River in Falluja, a city that has only recently been liberated from Da'esh. The bridge had sustained significant damage during both occupation and liberation, and one section was completely demolished, rendering it unusable. UNMAS destroyed over half a ton of homemade explosives found in an improvised device embedded into the body of the bridge. As a result, structural engineering assessments can go ahead safely and the bridge can be re-constructed to support rehabilitation of the city.

In Falluja, UNMAS emergency response teams have been operational since August. So far over 250,000 square metres of land have been surveyed and cleared in 26 locations for the reconstruction of critical infrastructure. This has resulted in the removal of over 80 explosive devices from electricity facilities, water and sewage plants, bridges, and government office locations. Alongside this technical response, UNMAS provided risk education to 789 people at Al Mazra'a IDP camp in preparation for their return to the city.

Drawing on the experience gained in Falluja, UNMAS is coordinating an appropriate explosive hazard threat mitigation management response to support the Government and UN plans to enable the conditions necessary to facilitate stabilization and humanitarian assistance efforts in Mosul. As areas close to Mosul

are retaken, and as the front line moves, addressing the threat of explosive hazards will become increasingly critical. UNMAS is preparing to expand operations to Al Qayarrah and Sherqat in the coming months. Threat impact assessments and technical survey will guide humanitarian partners to safe areas and support civilians fleeing Mosul by identifying suitable areas for temporary settlement. Risk education will be essential to ensure families are adequately informed of possible explosive contamination close to these new areas of settlement, as well as prepare those displaced for their return.

*Lessons Learned:
Requirement for Standards*

It has also become clear that there is an urgent need for UN standards specific to Improvised Explosive Device Disposal. The proliferation of IEDs by organizations such as Da'esh has necessitated a shift in Mine Action to expand clearance beyond traditional demining. The scale of the use of IEDs in Iraq is such that the scope and purpose of the clearance guidance set forth in the International Mine Action Standards has been exceeded, and as such, new standards need to be developed to ensure the safety of humanitarian actors and peacekeepers. UNMAS is coordinating the development of these IED Disposal Standards which will establish the required level of proficiency for IEDD operators for both humanitarian actors and UN peacekeeping

forces. Additionally, the standards will address the clearance of IEDs in complex urban and residential areas. Currently, no standards exist which detail how to clear a home, a school or a hospital that have been booby-trapped by IEDs. The UN standards that UNMAS has begun working on will set the conditions by which humanitarian organizations can return a home to a displaced family or a school to a stabilizing community. The development of such IEDD standards will not only provide specificity and uniformity of the minimum capabilities of all IEDD personnel, including peacekeepers and humanitarian operators alike.

One of the first steps taken by UNMAS as the coordinator of the UN system for mine action has been the UN elaboration of IEDD guidelines for UN personnel and the IED related section of the UN security and safety policy. We then responded to requests for an ‘IED Lexicon’ which UNMAS recently made available on its IED on-line hub. This well needed Lexicon lays the foundation for the elaboration of these standards by establishing a common language and understanding of the relevant terms. We have brought some copies of this lexicon today – feel free to take a copy.

(Lessons Learned: High operating costs)

Finally, it has become clear that the costs are high and the kinetic nature of the context leaves little time for extensive resource

mobilization. For Mosul alone, US\$ 50 million are required to prepare for adequate mine action response to the anticipated humanitarian crisis, while US\$ 112 million is anticipated for the whole of Iraq in 2017, and US\$ 178 million in 2018.

UNMAS is now faced with the Sector’s increasing demands for coordination; The same applies to the mapping of “who does what” in IED threat mitigation in the UN system through the IACG-MA which UNMAS Chairs; UNMAS field and HQ alike are called to answer requests of assistance to affected countries with the drafting of national standards; the UN demands for authoritative expert contributions in policy matters; UNMAS is supporting a number of UN reporting and information management efforts, in peace operations and humanitarian context alike. UNMAS expertise and lead in innovating approaches are increasingly being sought by affected countries, regional organizations and other partners. UNMAS HQ needs to beef up its in-house capacity with a dedicated IED threat mitigation advisory team. I would encourage those in a position to provide UNMAS with the requisite financial support to contact me

(Conclusion)

Drawing on lessons learned, and with support from the international community, UNMAS is conducting clearance

operations around key infrastructure sites, strengthening the national capacity in IED threat mitigation and delivering critical risk education. This is considered essential to saving lives, enabling humanitarian access and supporting stabilization activities. There is a role for all Member States to play in supporting this; it is important to avoid duplicating existing undertakings. We must continue to build on the solid knowledge and experience that we have acquired together, the UN, affected and less directly affected countries. We must foster the sharing of experience and lessons learnt and context specific information. There are synergies which can easily be optimized. A coherent and complementary approach is the key to this complex, multi-faceted and cross-cutting challenge that we all face today. To the “whole-of-government” approach, UNMAS responds with its coordination of a “Whole-of-UN” approach.

The challenges are enormous and the work will not be quick to complete, however, with strong political and financial support and result-oriented partnerships, the threat posed by complex explosive devices can be defeated.

Remember: contamination is not an incurable disease. There is a safer future for all Iraqis.