

UN Mine Action Service Director Agnès Marcaillou

Remarks to the Humanitarian Affairs Segment

of the 2017 Economic and Social Council

Geneva, 23 June 2017

**Restoring Humanity and Leaving No-one Behind: Working
together to reduce people's humanitarian need, risk and vulnerability**

As delivered

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen

Today, in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, thousands of people fleeing shelling and artillery fire continue to risk their lives at every step taken on contaminated land.

Every citizen of Ramadi, Fallujah, Mosul, looking for access to basic services or simply for a place where an IDP camp could be established, every one of them is exposed to the deadly threat posed by Improvised explosive devices and ERW.

The significance of mine action for these people is not a conference room matter; it is not an afterthought.

This is why, for no one to be left behind, it is our moral and professional duty to integrate mine action into humanitarian planning and programming and financing at the outset of a humanitarian and protection response.

UNMAS was created 20 years ago by the UN General Assembly to coordinate mine action; the aim was, and still is, to maximize synergies, bridge divides amongst different sectors, strengthen partnerships; in short, make humanitarian responses more immediate through safe access to communities and more effective, including cost-effective. Needs Driven - People Centered is not just the mantra of its 20th anniversary; it is what guides every one of its interventions.

UNHCR's delegation to UNMAS of the coordination of mine action under the Global Protection Cluster has contributed to strengthening the humanitarian sector's understanding of and response to emergencies in conflict-related settings.

Like UNICEF, UNMAS has translated its commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit into concrete actions and actual results, including localization and empowerment of 18 female local partners.

Over 5000 UNMAS staff are currently deployed on the frontlines of some 18 countries and territories, such as Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Mali, Iraq, Libya; Somalia; South Sudan; Syria just to name a few.

Over the last two years, the intensification of conflicts and the use of large amounts and a wide diversity of weaponry have dramatically increased the

number of affected people. Increasingly, the UN and its partners are operating in violent, complex and asymmetric environments, where parties to conflicts continue to blatantly disregard International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law.

Indeed, casualties caused by anti-personnel mines has decreased; however, the overall number of casualties caused by improvised explosive devices, anti-vehicle mines and other explosive remnants of war has gone up. In Iraq, Syria, Somalia, terrorist groups lay down mines and/or booby-trap homes, schools, hospitals, and key infrastructure, on an unprecedented scale.

Protecting civilians has never been so dangerous and expensive. Clearing paths for first responders as well as homes for people to return, requires the kind of special expertise and equipment that UNMAS was created to provide to communities. Furthermore, more victims of explosions have become disabled for life and will require emergency as well as long-term assistance. Now is the time to adhere to the Charter on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action to ensure that no one is left behind. Now is the time to translate your support for victim assistance into actions.

What is being done? the UN response is guided by its Strategy on Mine Action for 2013-2018. In the case of UNMAS and its partners, the response is multi-fold.

- The coordination of vast risk education campaigns is essential to prevent casualties;
- Mainstreaming gender perspectives in all aspects of mine action, including through training and employment of female national staff, increases the positive impact of our interventions;
- The risk education and mentoring of aid workers is crucial to open roads and clear infrastructures;
- Similarly, contamination assessments make hazardous areas safe for communities to live;
- Elaboration of international mine action and IED Disposal, Safety and Training standards improves work efficiency;
- Lastly, building a national response capacity for affected countries to tend to their own needs in the long term is at the core of UNMAS commitment to results.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope I have built a strong case for stakeholders to **no longer consider mine action as an afterthought**. It is at the core of protection and effective humanitarian planning and programming.

Over the past two decades, UNMAS has consistently adapted its programmes to the evolving needs of people affected by the legacy of wars.

What is needed for people to not be left behind is action, yours and ours.

Time has come to translate support into tangible, measurable and effective action. **Remember the first step that a shell-shocked family will take on contaminated grounds when they flee barrel bombs and other types of shelling.**

Let's be brave and act to change the way we have done business to date.

Thank you.