

The Bangkok Workshop on Achieving a Mine-Free South East Asia

(Bangkok, 1-3 April 2009)

Intervention by the United Nations Mine Action Team (UNMAT)

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I wish first of all to thank the Government of Thailand for inviting the United Nations to the Bangkok Workshop on achieving a Mine-Free South East Asia. On behalf of the United Nations Mine Action Team, we also congratulate the European Union, the Implementation Support Unit and the GICHD for this important joint initiative in support of the Mine Ban Treaty through a series of regional workshops in 2009.

The United Nations started addressing the mine and explosive remnants of war problem in the 1990's in support of peace-keeping, reconstruction and development efforts. Since then, the United Nations, through 14 departments, agencies, programmes and funds, has assisted some 50 countries in addressing the humanitarian, socio-economic and other impacts caused by landmines and explosive remnants of war.

To best support mine- affected countries and territories with mine action activities, the United Nations works under a coordination mechanism called the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, also known as the UNITED NATIONS MINE ACTION TEAM (UNMAT).

Today at this workshop, four members of the UNMAT are represented

- Tim Horner and Melissa Sabatier, from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lao and Cambodia respectively. UNDP provides mine action advice in more than forty countries and assists in the development of national capacity and capabilities in all components of mine action, including in resource mobilization and in the integration of mine action into development plans and national planning and programming with associated budget lines;
- Sebastian Kasack, from UNICEF Sri Lanka. UNICEF has been assisting a number of countries in the region. UNICEF provides assistance in mine risk education (MRE), in Victim Assistance (VA) and in advocacy.
- I am Stephen Robinson, from the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Nepal, UNMAS implements mine action activities in primarily support of UN Peace Keeping Operations and in emergency situations. UNMAS is also the focal point for mine action

within the United Nations system. We ensure effective coordination within the UNMAT, including in our collective assistance to mine affected countries.

The United Nations as a whole, and the UNMAT more specifically, fully support the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty, as well as its universalization and faithful implementation. The APMBT forms part of the legal framework for mine action within the United Nations system. It provides countries with an excellent framework for their mine action and victim assistance activities.

The United Nations Mine Action Team would like to highlight that there are still countries in the region that are not yet Party to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention. Of the 13 countries present at this conference, six have not yet acceded, namely Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. We urge these countries to accede to the Treaty as soon as possible and to demonstrate positive steps towards accession, such as a voluntary transparency report and the destruction of stockpiles.

In the region, the United Nations Mine Action Team is providing direct support to Cambodia, Lao, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

In Thailand, UNDP provided financial support to the Thai Government and the TMAC in 2000-2001 to conduct a Level one impact survey and data management. In 2007-2008, UNDP and the Thai Government have jointly developed a programme aimed at increasing local national capacities to implement and manage effective mine action activities. UNDP is in the process of recruiting a technical adviser to support that programme.

In Cambodia, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) set up the Cambodian Mine Action Center in 1992 to undertake demining, data collection, victim assistance and mine risk education in support of the peace agreement. In 2000, UNDP supported the creation of the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority as a national regulatory body to manage and coordinate mine action activities in the countries. Today, UNICEF supports mine risk education activities and UNDP currently supports mine clearance activities and capacity development of the Cambodian Mine Action and Victim Assistance Authority (CMAA) through Clearing for Results which is a 5 year project worth 24 million US dollars.

UNDP and UNICEF supported the creation of the Lao National UXO Programme (UXO Lao) in 1996. It was established as a national capacity to address the long-term humanitarian and development challenges caused by the threat of mines, UXO and in particular cluster munitions. At the request of the Government in 2006 UNDP helped establish the National Regulatory Authority as the Government Authority and focal point for the Mine and UXO Sector. Today UNDP has a continuing technical assistance, programme support and resource mobilization role

to both the NRA and UXO Lao. UNDP has also undertaken sector evaluations to assess progress against the strategic plan, including the review of the effectiveness of Government and donor support. Recommendations from these evaluations together with new obligations under the Conventions on both; the Rights of Persons With Disabilities and on Cluster Munitions will help guide the revision of the Strategic Plan this year.

In Nepal, the UNMAT has established the first operationalisation of the inter agency concept in an effected country with UNMAS, UNICEF and some support from UNDP coming together in a single unified programme. UNMAS is providing direct support to ex combatants to provide quality ensured clearance of the remaining minefields and ERW including large numbers of IED's, which is synchronized with UNICEF's MRE and VA activities in joint planning and implementation.

In Sri Lanka, UNDP is supporting the National Steering Committee on Mine Action (NSCMA) and other national capacity to manage, implement and sustain mine action activities in the country. UNDP will support the establishment of a National Mine Action Centre and expects that it is fully-functioning by end-2009, after which it will function as a national institution with resource commitments from Government and donor agencies. UNICEF is supporting mine risk education, victim assistance and advocacy activities with the financial support of the European Union. Mine action is a pre-requisite for safe return of tens of thousands Internally Displaced from the current conflict.

In Vietnam, UNICEF supported mine risk education in six priority provinces reaching some 500,000 people in 2007 alone. It also trained some 500 trainers. Lack of casualty data and continued scrap metal collection are major challenges to conduct MRE.

To States Parties to the Treaty, UNDP supports drafting requests for extension or declaring completion of Article 5 obligations. UNDP also provides technical advisory support to the Presidency of the 9th MSP through the review of the Article 5 of the APMBT extension requests. UNDP also provides support to States parties in drafting Article 7 transparency reporting for the APMBT in countries of operation.

The United Nations Mine Action Team has at its disposal various mechanisms to mobilize financial support for the implementation of all mine action, risk education, victim assistance and advocacy activities. In countries where a Peace Keeping Force is deployed, the UN can access the assessed budget for peace keeping operations. Agencies of the UNMAT also manage additional trust funds for Mine Action and channel direct donor support to programmes.

The United Nations also supports the development and implementation of other legal instruments such as the CCW and its protocols, especially protocol 5 on explosive remnants of

war. In addition, let me recall the UN's commitment to another ground breaking instrument, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which has enormously benefited from the experience, lessons learned and challenges of the APMBT community. Already 96 countries have signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions including 5 which have ratified. We would like to use this opportunity to reiterate the Secretary General's Ban Ki-Moon Statement calling for all states to sign and ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions as soon as possible.

The UNMAT has taken the lead in ensuring cross cutting issues such as gender mainstreaming are taken into account in mine action programmes.

For those countries that do not receive assistance from the United Nations to address its mine and ERW problem, the United Nations is here to convey its readiness to consider requests of assistance to complement or supplement the current national efforts of your governments together with other eventual partnerships.

We look forward to a successful Second Review Conference in Cartagena, Colombia, later this year. We commend the commitment by the Government of Colombia and its representatives here to meet every aspect of the treaty obligations, whether it refers to clearance targets or risk education or the, assistance to survivors and their families, as well as its leadership in advocating for a mine free world.

We also take the opportunity to offer Ambassador Jurg Streuli of Switzerland the full support of the United Nations Mine Action Team in his endeavor towards preparing the Cartagena Review Conference.

A re-invigorating commitment of the remaining States Parties in South East Asia with regards to their Article 5 obligations, together with a sustained support of the international community of donors, should allow us to steadily approach the next status of a Mine-Free South East Asia. Please count with the full support of the United Nations to achieve this goal.

Thank you