

Explosive remnants of war hinder development, Assistant Secretary-General says as Fourth Committee begins debate on assistance in mine action (UN)

Mines and explosive remnants of war impeded sustainable peace, as well as the long-term development of affected societies, Jane Lute, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) this morning as that body began its consideration of assistance in mine action.

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Mines and explosive remnants of war impeded sustainable peace, as well as the long-term development of affected societies, Jane Lute, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, said in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) this morning as that body began its consideration of assistance in mine action.

She said in a statement on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations that United Nations mine action was a model for other sectors in capturing lessons learned and systematizing them into a consistent, integral doctrine. The mine-action sector had established industry-wide standards in a broad range of activities, codified in the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). The sector was also continuously seeking to improve its information gathering and analysis, specifically through the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and had taken a leading role in coordinating the articulation of issues central to United Nations mine action.

Reviewing the progress achieved over the last year in such key areas as coordination, clearance, mine-risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and outreach and advocacy, she said the United Nations was working in an environment where more mines came out of the ground than were planted each year. The number of anti-personnel landmines in stockpiles - those held by State, as well as non-State actors - continued to fall.

John Flanagan, Chief of the Programme Support Section of the United Nations Mine Action Service, and Ms. Lute then answered delegates' questions during an interactive discussion. Asked for a progress report on gender guidelines, Ms. Lute said that in February 2005, a small mission had been sent to test such guidelines in Afghanistan. The mission had been able to have gender considerations included in strategic plans, but opportunities to include women in data collections had been missed. There should, therefore, be a focal point person in each programme who would raise that issue constantly.

In the ensuing general debate, the representative of Switzerland said that since the Ottawa Convention and the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons had become binding legal instruments, a significant improvement in the living conditions of directly affected populations had been achieved. Mine action could make very concrete contributions to peace negotiations as it was often one of the first points on which parties to a conflict could agree. Nevertheless, several countries and many non-State groups continued to produce and disseminate anti-personnel mines, and more than 40 States had not committed themselves to the ban on them.

The representative of the United Kingdom, speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said international mine action not only worked towards a world free of the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, but also helped contribute towards global peace and stability and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Mine action was therefore an important priority for the European Union, having allocated 384 million to it since 2003.

Regarding a draft resolution on mine-action assistance, he expressed the hope that a text could be win approval by consensus at a future meeting of the Committee. The draft would not only draw attention to an issue that tragically affected thousands of people worldwide, but it would also help to demonstrate the collective resolve to address that challenge through international commitments and collaboration.

Regarding the draft resolution, Cuba's representative said that the differences that had prevented its adoption last year were related mainly to two questions: the attempt by some to limit the text's main goal of assistance and cooperation; and the evaluation of United Nations policy in the field of mine action. The term "mine action" should, in principle, only refer to activities aimed at dealing with the problems resulting from the indiscriminate and irresponsible presence of landmines. The text should focus on the humanitarian dimension and international assistance to affected countries, and the legal and security issues should not be discussed within that framework. Moreover, countries that had placed mines in the territory of others should bear the legal and political responsibilities.

Other speakers this morning included the representatives of Jordan, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Ukraine.

The Fourth Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 27 October, to continue its general debate on assistance in mine action.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this morning to begin its consideration of "assistance in mine action", an item that was allocated to it for the first time during its last session, and which will be addressed biennially. In the absence of consensus on a draft resolution last year, the General Assembly decided that the Committee would consider the item during the current session.

A report of the Secretary-General entitled United Nations mine action: a strategy for 2001-2005 (document A/58/260 and Add.1) contains six strategic goals and 48 objectives. The six goals are:

- information is produced and made available to all to understand and address mine-action problems;
- mine action is effectively coordinated and implemented in United Nations-managed programmes and planning processes;
- national and local authorities effectively plan, coordinate and implement mine-action programmes;
- mine-action operations are implemented to the highest attainable standard;
- adequate resources for mine action are mobilized, and their use is effectively coordinated; and
- universal adherence to and compliance with all international instruments and/or commitments that address landmine and/or unexploded ordnance problems and/or that advance the rights of affected persons.

Another report of the Secretary-General, Eliminating the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war: United Nations advocacy strategy for 2004-

2005 (document A/59/284/add.1), contains seven strategic goals of an advocacy strategy drafted by United Nations mine-action partners. The seven goals are:

- all States take legislative, political and financial steps to combat the effects of landmines and explosive remnants of war;
- the general public is aware of all aspects of the landmine and explosive remnants of war and of strategies developed to combat the problem;
- donors are aware of funding requirements to combat the problem of landmines and explosive remnants of war and respond with adequate funding;
- armed non-State actors adhere to and comply with commitments and obligations to halt immediately and unconditionally new deployments of anti-personnel mines, and to comply with relevant international human rights and humanitarian norms and standards;
- mine action is integrated into humanitarian, peacekeeping and development programmes, plans and budgets;
- national mine-action organizations incorporate the key principles of United Nations mine-action strategy into their own policies and programmes; and
- mine action is addressed on the agendas and in the programmes of relevant regional organizations.

The Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is the focal point for United Nations mine action. The Inter-agency Coordination Group for Mine Action is responsible for the overall coordination of United Nations mine-action, which is undertaken by 13 departments, programmes, funds and agencies. The Steering Committee on Mine-Action brings together members of the Inter-agency Coordination Group and representatives of various groups, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is the lead agency for mine-risk education.

Introductory Statement by Assistant-Secretary-General

JANE LUTE, Assistant-Secretary-General, speaking on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Marie Guéhenno, said that last year, the mine action team's efforts to address the scourge of mines and explosive remnants of war, which were an impediment to sustainable peace and an obstacle to the long-term development of affected societies, had been reviewed. Those challenges were no less real now, and the Organization's role in mitigating them was no less important. United Nations mine action was a model for other sectors in capturing lessons learned and systematizing them into a consistent, integral doctrine.

She said the mine action sector had established industry-wide standards in a wide range of activities, codified in the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). The sector was also continuously seeking to improve the gathering of information and analysis, specifically through the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). The UNMAS had taken a leading role in coordinating the articulation of issues central to United Nations mine action. The recently published document "Mine Action and Effective Coordination: the United Nations inter-agency Policy" clarified the way in which decisions were made and coordination was achieved among mine action team members and other stakeholders.

Reviewing achievements in key areas of mine action over the past 12 months, she said that in the area of coordination, inter-agency assessment missions had been conducted in Senegal and Uganda. In the area of landmine and explosive remnants of war clearance, including technical survey, mapping, marking, clearance, post-clearance documentation, community liaison and the handover of cleared land, the United Nations had made strides to expand and bolster its support in affected Member States. The United Nations was working in an environment where more mines came out of the ground than were planted each year. Work in Cyprus illustrated how mine action could contribute to peacebuilding. Through a joint effort by United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UNMAS, the mine action programme was removing the physical barrier between the two sides and opening the way for more crossing points.

In the area of mine-risk education, the application of new standards contained in the IMAS had resulted in more focused interventions targeted at those most at risk, she said, citing the examples of assistance in Colombia, Nepal and the Sudan. In the area of victim assistance, the aim had been to increase resources dedicated to the physical, socio-economic, educational and vocational training needs of survivors and their families. The Portfolio of Mine Action Projects for 2006, to be published next month, showed a significant increase in the number of victim assistance projects that addressed the entire cycle, from emergency first aid to social reintegration.

She said that in the area of stockpile destruction, the number of anti-personnel landmines in stockpiles continued to fall. That was true not only for stockpiles held by States, but also for those held by non-State actors. As for outreach and advocacy, an inter-agency communications strategy had been developed across United Nations-supported programmes for more effective communication on the work being done. To make mine action information widely accessible, the electronic mine network at www.mineaction.org had been redesigned. In 2004, the UNMAS had also developed public service announcements broadcast by networks around the world, which continued to be viewed by almost 1,500 viewers per week. Also, high-level missions had been deployed to a number of countries to urge adherence to treaties that formed the normative basis for mine action.

In conclusion, she said those achievements would not have been possible without the generous support of donor Governments and the tireless dedication of mine- and explosive remnants of war-affected States. The role of the United Nations was one of "assistance in mine action", which was integral to the Organization's mission.

Questions and Answers

ADAM THOMSON (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union, asked what progress had been made in achieving the objectives of the mine action strategy for 2001-2005, and what lessons had been learned. The European Union would also welcome a progress report on the gender guidelines that were due to be field tested in 2005.

JOHN FLANAGAN, Chief, Programme Support Section, United Nations Mine Action Service, said that many of the objectives of the mine action strategy had been achieved in the first couple of years. Therefore a review had been held in 2003, when more objectives had been added to the original list. An important objective was information and making it available to people in afflicted countries. In that regard a mine action web site had been developed, which now received 5,000 visits a week. An inter-agency communication strategy had also been implemented, and version four of the information mine action system was about to be released.

Two inter-agency assessment missions had been undertaken last year in Uganda and Senegal, resulting in mine action programmes being implemented in those countries, he said. Two more such missions would be undertaken this year. Furthermore, mine action was being implemented at the forefront of peace negotiations.

A further goal was to enable national and local authorities to implement mine action programmes, he went on. The United Nations had carried out 15 impact-based surveys, and had facilitated the implementation of 20 national plans. A senior and middle management training programme for national staff had been established, and so far it had trained 400 people from 20 different countries. The Mine Action Service had also worked to obtain commitments from non-State actors to adhere to current international norms and halt the use of landmines.

There were 48 objectives in the 2001-2005 strategy, the vast majority of which had been achieved, he said. A more comprehensive review of the five-year strategy would be undertaken in the very near future in order to draw up the 2006-2010 strategy, which would be more action-oriented and results-based.

Ms. LUTE, replying to the second question, said that the idea of the gender guidelines was to ensure that people in the field were considering the impact of their work on men, women, boys and girls. She suggested points in the work of mine-action programmes at which those considerations should be borne in mind. In February 2005, a small mission had been sent to test the guidelines in Afghanistan, and it had been able to raise gender considerations and have them included in strategic plans. However, opportunities had been missed to include women in data collections. From that, the

considerations and have them included in strategic plans. However, opportunities had been missed to include women in such considerations. From that, the conclusion had been reached that there should be a focal point in each programme who would raise that issue constantly. Furthermore, if the guidelines that people used in the field every day did not have integrated gender-based issues, they would not be taken into account. Therefore, a document audit had been undertaken to ensure that gender was not just a stand-alone set of guidelines. In addition Cranfield University was developing training materials in that regard. The guidelines themselves had not required revision. What they needed was implementation, and there was a coordinated and focused approach in that regard.

Statements

HARON HASSAN (Jordan) said that prior to implementing its mine action strategy in 1993, his country had suffered significantly from landmines. Mine action not only helped protect the lives of many, but removing them also opened the way towards economic prosperity for the communities that had been restricted by them. Jordan's goal continued to be decreasing the risk of death and injury from landmine accidents and rehabilitating demined areas in an effort to alleviate poverty and promote development in and around such areas. As of last year, the country had removed more than one third of all its landmines, and was determined to meet the 2009 deadline of a mine-free Jordan.

He said that some of his country's key strategic objectives for 2005-2009 included: undertaking a modified landmine impact survey in order to provide the necessary data to prioritize, plan and report on progress made in relation to the 2009 deadline; continuing the mine-risk education campaign that had started in 2004, using the formal education system, the media and local communities; and securing proper funds in order to carry out the required mine-action activities. Jordan thanked the United States, Canada, Norway, Germany, the United Kingdom and others for their assistance over the years and looked forward to their continued support.

ROMAN HUNBER (Switzerland) said that since the Ottawa Convention and the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons had become binding legal instruments, a significant improvement had been achieved in the living conditions of directly affected populations. Nevertheless, several countries and many non-State groups continued to produce and disseminate anti-personnel mines, and more than 40 States had not committed themselves to the ban on them. Those States were urged to join the Ottawa Convention as soon as possible. Switzerland welcomed the Organization's adoption of a renewed anti-mine policy, which made it possible to clarify the coordination mechanisms and the responsibilities of other United Nations entities. Only with clear mandates and common objectives would it be possible to effectively counter the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war.

Reporting on his country's two-year presidency of the Mine Action Support Group, he said dialogue between that informal group of donor countries and the United Nations had been promoted, and the role of mine action in peace process had been examined. Mine action could make very concrete contributions to peace negotiations as it was often one of the first points on which parties to a conflict could agree. Switzerland anti-mine strategy for 2004-2007 foresaw the financing of projects in the areas of demining, risk education, and assistance to victims and advocates of mine action, which would amount to approximately \$12 million per annum. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining offered operational and research assistance to mine-affected countries.

Regarding the integration of mine action into development projects, he said the World Bank's commitment to anti-mine projects was encouraging. Switzerland would continue to promote the role of mine action in development and peace processes and to raise the question of non-State actors and their use of anti-personnel mines, and would welcome the adoption of a resolution on assistance to mine action that would raise awareness of the problem and strengthen coordination and cooperation in the field. Such a development would show that only a collective commitment and responsibility at all levels could make it possible to achieve, as fast as possible, the objective of a world free of anti-personnel mines.

LI SONG (China) said his Government attached great importance to the humanitarian problems caused by landmines. The revised landmine protocol of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention handled the matter in a balanced way and should enjoy universal participation, as well as strict adherence. China had actively carried out publicity and education on the issue of mine action, and had destroyed landmines in stages, with about 500,000 destroyed so far. During the 1990s, it had carried out two large-scale demining actions in its border regions, and had ensured that the populations of those areas were not harmed by landmines.

It was important to step up exchanges and communications with the States parties to the Ottawa Convention, he said. China was positively considering sending an observer mission to take part in the meeting of the Convention that would take place in Croatia. In addition, China had provided assistance to about 10 Asian and African countries by donating, detection and clearing equipment, as well as by sending experts to help in the training of demining personnel. In September 2005, for example, China had started a mine clearance assistance programme for the Thai Government, and had donated mine clearing equipment.

ALOUNKEO KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that every day innocent people were injured or killed by landmines and other unexploded ordnance scattered on the surface or buried in the soil in many countries around the world. Every effort should therefore be made to intensify international cooperation in mine action.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic was seriously affected by unexploded ordnance, he continued. During the Indochina war, more than 500,000 bombing missions had been launched, and more than 2 million tons of bombs had been dropped on the country. The war had ended 30 years ago, but its effects remained in 15 of the country's 18 provinces. Unexploded ordnance was found almost everywhere - near houses, schools, hospitals, in rice fields and gardens.

In order to address the problem, he said the Lao Government had set up, in 1996, the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme, known as UXO Lao, with the objectives of reducing civilian casualties and increasing the amount of land available for food production and other development activities. Currently, the UXO Lao was implementing the 10-year National Strategic Plan (2003-2013), which targeted three different areas for mine action: agricultural areas; grazing land, forested and communal areas; and tourism, commercial and business sites.

SERGII SHUTENKO (Ukraine) said it was important to set up national mine-action strategies with a view to ensuring effective decision-making regarding short-, medium- and long-term priorities. The needs of mine-affected communities must set the basic parameters for assistance in mine action. At the same time, the allure of operational mine clearance should not deflect attention from its other aspects, such as victim assistance. Therefore, the timely mobilization of resources from donors was essential to the success of the relevant programmes.

He said the Government of Ukraine had recently initiated a United Nations multidisciplinary inter-agency mission to assess the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance, and identify requirements for further assistance by the United Nations, other international institutions and the donor community. Additional financial assistance should be provided to mine-affected countries, not only for mine clearance, but also for stockpile destruction and unexploded ordnance disposal. The Government called for the continuation of United Nations efforts to foster the establishment of relevant national activities. Prohibition of the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines should become the ultimate goal of the international community.

ILEANA NÚÑEZ MORDOCHE (Cuba) expressed the hope that Member States would be able to overcome the strong differences of the last session so that a resolution on assistance in mine action could be adopted by consensus. Those differences related mainly to two questions: the approach of some to trying to limit the text's main goal of assistance and cooperation; and the evaluation of the United Nations policy in the field of mine action.

She said that the term "mine action" should, in principle, only make reference to activities aimed to dealing with the problems resulting from the indiscriminate and irresponsible presence of landmines. The text should focus on the humanitarian dimension and international assistance to affected countries. Legal and security issues should not be discussed within that framework. According to the United Nations Charter, responsibility for the Organization's policies rested with the Member States. It was necessary to respect that approach, taking into account the strategic programme of the Organization's programme activities and its budget.

The demining process should not distract from other important aspects of mine-action activities, such as the assistance to victims, she said. The timely mobilization of international financial and technical assistance had special importance. At the same time, countries that had placed mines in the territory of other States should bear legal and political responsibilities as a consequence. The United Nations had an important task to accomplish by providing

of other States should bear legal and political responsibilities as a consequence. The United Nations had an important task to accomplish by providing assistance, upon request, to the affected countries, including the implementation of rehabilitation programmes. Such activities could be immensely useful to affected developing countries. Cuba supported a thorough review of additional financial and technical assistance to affected countries on the basis of mutual respect and the search for mutually acceptable solutions.

Mr. THOMSON (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said international mine action not only worked towards a world free of the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war, but also helped contribute towards peace and stability globally and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Mine action, therefore, was an important priority for the European Union, with 384 million euro allocated for such activities since 2003. Another important goal was the universalization of the Ottawa Convention. The European Union was pleased that 147 States had agreed to be bound by its provisions. Progress in strengthening the provisions of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, particularly with respect to the adoption of a fifth Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War, was also welcome.

He said the European Community's multi-annual programme and strategy for 2005 to 2007 set the ambitious goal of a world where no one would be injured or killed by landmines. To that end, the Community would devote itself to furthering and strengthening international assistance in mine action by promoting implementation of the Ottawa Convention, reducing the threat posed by landmines, and assisting affected local populations socially, economically and medically. The European Union appreciated the wide variety of stakeholders engaged in mine-action activities and underlined the importance of cooperation and coordination in order to avoid duplication and ensure the most effective use of resources, building on national capacity where possible.

Regarding a draft resolution on Assistance in Mine Action, he expressed the hope that the text could be approved by consensus at a future meeting of the Committee. The draft not only drew attention to an issue that tragically affected thousands of people worldwide, but it also helped demonstrate the collective resolve to address the challenge through international commitments and collaboration.

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