

**Statement by the Coordinator of the UN system and Chair of Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action
Meeting of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG)
15 February 2018**

Dear Ambassador,

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished participants,

Dear friends,

Greetings from New York City.

I understand that the 2018 vintage of mine action week is again a great success. I miss being with my colleagues and friends.

I also miss being with you, MASG participants, at the US mission. I am glad that my UN colleagues are there and that, thanks to technology and with the support of the US mission and you, Stan, I am still able to feel that I am with you.

I am speaking to you this afternoon on behalf of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action (IACG-MA).

[Chairmanship]

Firstly, allow me to renew our congratulations to the United States of America for assuming the chairmanship of the Mine Action Support Group (MASG). We have been long-time partners and we endeavor to continue to contribute to constructive and forward-looking exchanges, and also support action-oriented meetings.

We would also like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Italian chair, our friend Ambassador Lambertini and his team, and to his Government, for their dynamic leadership and genuine commitment to supporting the UN in mine action through a busy MASG term.

Significance of the MASG for the United Nations

[Information exchange platform]

SG Guterres often reminds us that the world is going through very troubling times. The briefings we have prepared for you will validate your countries' views that mine action is, increasingly, an essential pre-requisite to life saving humanitarian emergency responses, to access, to the safe return of displaced populations, to stabilization and reconstruction. The majority of statements made, this week, in the Kuwait conference on Iraq's reconstruction, explicitly referred at highest level to mine action requirements both in humanitarian and stabilization contexts.

[Resourcing mine action, a sound investment]

In this context, no country can really afford any longer to consider mine action as an after-thought; as a stand-alone budget line that will be funded after humanitarian or reconstruction budgets have been allocated, if or when countries need to deal with their end-of-year under-spent. Mine action is a post conflict essential requirement; the role of the UN in mine action is recognized as significant in your

countries' statements, resolutions and in peoples' daily lives: its work must be adequately resourced.

[Critical platform]

This is why, as Under-Secretary-General Lacroix speaking to you as Chair of the IACG said, this platform, the MASG, is of utmost importance to the United Nations. The MASG is indeed the only global platform for the UN to hold interactive and transparent exchanges with a wide array of donors on a mine action agenda of common interest. Many of you may not travel enough out to affected countries and experience, first hand, the reality of "contamination" and its impact. Whether in NY, or in Geneva during Mine Action week, we see MASG meetings as an opportunity for the UN to bring the field to you.

In close cooperation with UNDP and UNICEF, we will continue to respond to your requests for such briefings.

[Collective consideration of priorities]

The substantive IACG briefings that UNMAS coordinates in close consultation with the Chair, offer you, donors, insight into the priorities, achievements and challenges of UN mine action programmes; our presentations complement the annual Mine Action Portfolio that UNMAS prepares together with UNDP and UNICEF. It gives you the opportunity to discuss specific situations and priorities in a close partnership and collective format.

[Platform for transparency and accountability]

The MASG meetings have also proven to foster greater understanding, and therefore trust, in this UN-Donors' mine action partnership through increased transparency and, face-to-face, accountability. We all know that this is invaluable for you to report back to your leadership, your Parliaments and, ultimately, your taxpayers.

[MASG in the field]

In addition, notwithstanding the continuation of biannual formal meetings of the MASG, and the possibility for the MASG to visit affected countries, (which Japan had led in Colombia during its Chairmanship), we would like to encourage you to learn from success stories; success stories, such as the initiative of the Italian ambassador in the Sudan, Ambassador Lobasso.

Italy's initiative to convene Sudan-specific MASG meetings with ambassadors in Khartoum resulted in greater Sudanese openness and accountability; the needs of the mine action community were kept high on the Sudanese government agenda, and its engagement, at high level, became more consistent. This in turn, increased donors' trust, and yielded significant progress in the Sudan, thanks to funding, in 2016 and 2017, from Japan, Italy, the Republic of Korea and USAID.

Informed by such examples, we, the UN in mine action, would like to further encourage the MASG Chair, as well as MASG members, to get the MASG closer to the field, in between the NY and Geneva regular meetings. We can also learn from what UNMAS programme manager

in the Sudan, Mr Javed Habibulhaq, did, with donors' great praise: he used this renewed partnership with the Sudanese Government to organize high-level visits of donors to witness the extent of the problems and/or the positive change that their countries' funding had triggered. In the Sudan too, with great support from UNDP and UNICEF senior representatives, we were able to assist you and your countries' initiatives.

[MASG membership]

Mr. Chairman,

We, the UN in mine action, want to commend your commitment, to broaden the membership of the MASG. Not only does the UN value partnership with a greater number of donors and expanded funding opportunities in times of national budgetary constraints; the UN also values the new perspectives and knowledge that the MASG increased geographical diversity may bring. We will support you, Mr. Chairman, in your undertaking.

[Need for greater donors' coordination]

For a number of years, we witness a multiplicity of donors' initiatives, conferences, meetings, workshops, and others, aimed at mobilizing resources for mine action in country-or theme-specific formats.

Following the path of the UN Secretary-General's reform, we are of the view that the MASG provides an ideal forum to exchange on such

bilateral initiatives, rationalize bilateral and multilateral ones, coordinate better donor responses and reduce overlaps. I will spare you the added value of cost-effectiveness, coordination and coherence. From a UN perspective, we feel it would strengthen the focus and impact of countries' bilateral and multilateral contributions, as well as rationalize planning of travel and conference time.

[UN VTF Funding]

The United Nations expresses its gratitude for your Governments' political and financial support for mine action. Every penny counts and is welcomed. I would like to make a special mention of this year's UN VTF "champion", Germany, which in 2017 became the largest contributor to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund. The United Nations appreciates Germany's prioritization of mine action, at a time when so many requests for funding are competing. As we always do, we will ensure the right level of visibility for Germany's support.

[Unearmarked funding]

Because this is a donors' meeting, we deem it appropriate to draw your attention to operative paragraph 4 (c) of GA resolution 72/75, adopted by consensus only two months ago. In it, UN member states "urged all, in particular those that have the capacity to do so to provide reliable,

predictable, timely, and where possible, multi-annual contributions to mine action capacities”.

It is important for the UN to limit administrative burdens and transactional costs; we must avoid diluting programmatic focus and decreasing our ability to respond rapidly to emergencies. The United Nations in mine action continues to be stretched thin and challenged by increased demands for risk education and victim assistance in addition to the increasing cost of rapid deployment and clearance in high-risk areas.

Unearmarked or core funding, which the Netherlands and Denmark spearheaded a few years ago in the MASG, is increasingly critical to fulfill your expectations of effective coordination work; provide support to the mine action sector at large; elaborate the next UN strategy through extensive and inclusive consultations; strengthen IACG transparency and accountability through stronger monitoring and evaluations or hold inclusive and field-focused international events like this mine action week in Geneva. As UNMAS Director, allow me to urge you to fund UNMAS’ endeavor to strengthen UN mine action efficiency and oversight.

[Conclusion]

With the MASG collective support, and, Mr. Chairman, under the leadership of the United States of America, we are confident that the

United Nations will be further empowered to assist States and populations affected by the deadly legacy of conflicts.

I thank you.