



United Nations Mine Action Service

13th Meeting of States Parties to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention

Presentation on Partnerships for Implementation; Session 2.a: Drawing Lessons - Successful Article 5 Completion through Solid Partnerships

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Madame Présidente,

At the outset allow me to thank you for inviting UNMAS to share its experience and views on cooperation and assistance. It is a pleasure for me to do so after UNMAS received, last month in New York, the month of confidence of the majority of affected and donor countries alike.

Strong partnerships and coordination in support of coherence and effectiveness of action were recognized by the General Assembly resolution on Assistance in Mine Action. Indeed, in addition to recognizing the primary role of States, Member States reaffirmed the significant role of the United Nations, through the members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action chaired by the United Nations Mine Action Service, including the integration of mine action in numerous United Nations peacekeeping operations and political missions.

The principle of partnership in Mine Action is also an integral part of the UN Strategy on Mine Action 2013-2018. Reinforcing national ownership and coordination of mine action programmes are key to a successful implementation of the Convention and other similar instruments. It is key to States Parties' fulfilment of their international obligations.

UNMAS was established by the General Assembly as the focal point for mine action and, as such, sits at the centre of partnerships and coordination of efforts, including when it supports affected countries' "commitment to complete". Establishment of partnerships and coordination are everyday business for UNMAS in particular in Afghanistan, a success story of synergies and interaction between a sovereign country and the United Nations Mine Action Service, which resulted in this Assembly, hailing their extension request as model to be followed.

One of the most heavily mined countries in the world, Afghanistan is the country with the oldest and one of the biggest mine action programmes worldwide. Afghanistan is probably the most telling example of how effective international partnerships could move this country towards a mine-free status, despite extremely challenging circumstances that we are

familiar with and the catastrophic humanitarian, socio-economic and environmental impact antipersonnel mines caused.

Indeed, Afghanistan could be called a pioneer in the domain of international partnerships for mine action. The very first United Nations funding appeal to address humanitarian consequences of landmines was launched on behalf of Afghanistan in 1988. This was a landmark appeal as all activities related to landmines were previously the responsibility of national military personnel. The Afghan case formed the origin of mine action as we know it today.

Since then, the partnership of the Government of Afghanistan and UNMAS has continued to evolve and to deepen, with, for a long time, steady and generous support of donor countries.

In 2002, with UNMAS assistance, Afghanistan acceded to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention, and entrusted interim responsibility for mine action to the United Nations. In Kabul, UNMAS established a joint coordination body, the Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (MACCA), and began the national capacity building process which culminated in April 2012 when UNMAS transitioned national ownership of the mine action programmes. Meanwhile, in 2008, the Government assigned its Department of Mine Clearance (DMC) to jointly work with MACCA.

Operating entirely and fully as an all Afghan entity managing the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan, it now benefits from a minimal UNMAS presence, three international staff members, ensuring the provision of advisory services, assistance in resource mobilization and funding oversight.

This long-standing partnership was based on trust and supported by committed individuals. It indeed achieved significant progress in mine action. Not only have thousands of explosive hazards been cleared in the last twenty years but this assertion of national ownership by MACCA resulted in a notable increase in the confidence of national staff in delivering “an Afghan solution to an Afghan problem”. This has also resulted in an international assistance component through the development by the MACCA of three South-South partnerships with South Sudan, Colombia and Tajikistan, where Afghan staff provides training, exchanges lessons learnt and best practices.

The partnership with the Government’s Department of Clearance (DMC) developed in parallel to UNMAS capacity building of the MACCA: In 2008, as I said, the DMC co-located with MACCA in a move that involved the Government more closely in the management and oversight of the mine action programme.

This arrangement not only brought all relevant actors in closer physical proximity to each other but enabled also DMC to gain thorough understanding of the day-to-day, practical workings of Afghanistan’s mine action programme.

This has developed so that now the staff of the DMC is fully integrated into the MACCA and delivers all aspects of the quality management process, post-demining impact

assessment, government liaison, as well as planning and prioritisation. There are no parts of the planning, prioritization, and decision-making processes of the national mine action programme in which the Department for Mine Clearance is not involved.

UNMAS considers this all-Afghan MACCA working with the DMC as one of the most significant achievements of its approach to partnerships and to enhancing national ownership in Afghanistan. Like in most countries where UNMAS is present, the trust of Afghan authorities in the qualified team of this UN entity specialized in mine action led to their request for advice and coordination of Afghan entities discussing the best options for the future mine action structure of Afghanistan, a national structure which must resist – in my own words – the test of times and national politics.

Another significant outcome of this successful partnership includes the elaboration of Afghanistan's Article 5 extension request, which was approved by you, the States Parties, in 2012, and hailed as a model for other States to follow. The extension request is a product of the partnership between DMC, MACCA, and UNMAS as well as implementing partners; indeed this inclusive approach was noted by the analysing team as well as the Implementation Support Unit.

Madame la Présidente,

Barriers, however, remain to be overcome for Afghanistan's goals under the completion plan to be met fully and in a timely manner.

Afghan national ownership is evident but more support needs to be given to ensure that mine action continues to be an area of national focus. The DMC is a department of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority. As such, heavy workload on the designated authority, competing priorities, and resource constraints require a continuous balance to ensure that the needs of mine action continue to be addressed effectively.

Despite decades of generous support by the donor community in Afghanistan, multiyear funding commitments still remain scarce. The extension request work plan is well designed and trustworthy: it was hailed by donors and it shall provide you with the incentive to invest in strategic partnerships to bring Afghanistan to completion by March 2013. This should be supported to mitigate the uncertainty caused by unpredictable funding.

Let's recall here what you, member states of the UN, adopted last month in the resolution of the 4th Committee and I would like to quote:

“Reliable, predictable, timely, and, where possible, multi-annual contributions for mine-action activities, including through national mine-action efforts and mine-action programmes of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, including those relating to rapid response, victim assistance and mine risk education, especially at the local level, as well as through relevant national, regional and global trust funds, including the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action;”

All of that must be provided and I need you to back that resolution, which will soon be adopted by the General Assembly.

Madame Présidente,

There are many lessons and good practices to learn from this example. I will limit my list to a few:

Stronger links and strengthened coherence of action must be established between affected states, donors, the UN and other partners; this increases cost effectiveness and increases the impact of all stakeholders' action.

As Kerry Brinkert of the ISU stated in Bangkok, the UN system and one specific aspect of the UN system (i.e., the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for mine action, a 3% fee fund administered by UNMAS) are explicitly mentioned in Article 6 of the Convention on Cooperation and Assistance. He also remarked that, as the UN system goes, it is one of the most important funding channels for most affected states and most donors. Furthermore, donors continued to use the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) managed by UNMAS as an effective mechanism to support not only completion in Afghanistan, but also similar efforts in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Uganda among others. There is scope to further expand the use of the VTF as a mechanism to support these partnerships.

This inter-agency funding mechanism can be considered as an existing and transparent global tool of coordination and coherence of funding at low cost.

The step of phasing out day-to-day management by over 150 international staff as part of targeted national capacity building is undoubtedly critical to engendering greater national ownership.

No measure of success is possible without the significant commitment by a national authority, such as the DMC, to oversee the management of their national mine action programme.

A national authority must be either located or closely related to the decision-making authorities, for national policies and priorities, to feature mine action high on the government's agenda;

Predictable, multi-year donor support is an absolute necessity, especially when clear plans for completion with supporting work plans are developed. We cannot let countries like Afghanistan down when implementing what was planned in their extension request.

UNMAS strives to assist donors by working closely with the Mine Action Support Group, a forum of donors committed to providing financial, political and technical support to UN mine action.

We commend Australia's work as Chair of the Mine Action Support Group for their work and efforts to strengthen coordination of mine action donors and we look forward also to working with Japan when it takes up the position as chair in 2014. UNMAS will provide

Japan and other interested states with advisory assistance in order to strengthen donor's actions coherence and effectiveness. The MASG affords an important opportunity for more partnerships with affected states and relevant stakeholders, such as the United Nations.

Madame Présidente,

In conclusion, while I have focused on the case of Afghanistan, many of the lessons learnt are also relevant for other countries. We are at your disposal to share experiences.

I thank you.