

Statement by Polly Brennan, Global Landmines Coordinator, UNICEF, to Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies

Wednesday 5 February, 2003

Co-chairs, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

- Thank you for once again giving me the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education, and Mine Action Technologies. Today I would like to make some brief comments, on behalf of the UN mine action agencies, about mine action integration, and interagency cooperation – two inextricably linked strands which make operational mine action more effective.
- When the Convention was formulated, it had a big vision – to eradicate existing, and prevent all future mine problems. It is this that makes it a humanitarian and disarmament hybrid, and perhaps why mine action inspires such passion in everyone from those sitting here today, to the deminer, mine risk educator, driver, and medic working in more than 30 countries as we speak.
- Two of the mine action pillars as outlined in the Mine Action and Effective Coordination, the UN Policy (1998) – mine risk education, and mine survey, clearance and marking – have increasingly come to be seen as sides of a coin.
- Mine risk education is about not only alerting people about mine threats, and assisting them to avoid them, but is, together with survey and surveillance activities, an interface between affected communities, and the teams which eradicate mines and other explosive remnants of war.
- To give an example, it is essential that we mark minefields to assist people in avoiding them. However for this to work, it is equally essential that we teach people to recognise minefield markings.
- It is also essential that we conduct active surveillance for mine contamination and accidents, and that communities, via mine risk education or survey, have focal points who know how and to whom to report any mine-related problems. In addition to assisting us with planning and prioritization of clearance, this is a human rights issue: rather than passively waiting for assistance, affected communities should have a say in decisions that affect them, and the means to makes their voices heard.
- Increasingly, the mine action community is coming to understand how the integration of mine action better serves those who are affected by placing them at the centre of the process, and by using its resources to greatest effect. This is reflected in terms of changing programme design and content by the UN, ICRC, and NGOs.

- For it to work, however, interagency coordination and cooperation is necessary at all levels.
- Increasingly, in humanitarian contexts, UN Mine Action Coordination Centres include UNICEF Mine Risk Education Advisors. Examples include Afghanistan, Eritrea, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Sudan.
- Transition to from emergencies to development is facilitated by the use of UNOPS as an executing partner, with UNDP assuming the lead from UNMAS, but with UNOPS providing continuity. In both scenarios, under the lead of either UNMAS or UNDP, the UN mine action agencies work together to develop or support a national plan for mine action.
- Similarly, in programmes led by national entities, and supported by UNDP, UNICEF assists in Mine Risk Education capacity building. Examples include Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, and, most recently, Iran.
- In countries or regions such as northern Caucasus and Colombia, where mine risk education is currently the only mine action component possible, UNICEF is endeavouring to work to develop data (via IMSMA), networks, and coordination mechanisms which will UN and other mine action agencies at such time as they are able to operate.
- UN mine action agencies now have a joint global strategy, an annual portfolio which has been brought in line with the Consolidate Appeal Process (CAP), format and timeline, and a division of labour based on comparative advantage.
- In addition to the UN Strategy, UNMAS, UNDP, UNICEF and UNOPS have worked together to develop the UN Mine Action Rapid Response Plan, to carry out threat monitoring, and interagency assessment missions, and have begun work on a Memorandum of Understanding to even better integrate their work.
- From field to Headquarters, these provide I think positive examples of how mine action partners are working together to make mine action more than the sum of its parts.

Thank you for this opportunity to illustrate how we turn policy into practice.