

## **The International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).**

*Ian Mansfield, Tuesday 8 May 2001, Geneva*

International standards for humanitarian mine clearance programmes were first proposed in July 1996 by working groups at an international conference held in Copenhagen. Criteria were prescribed for all aspects of mine clearance, standards were recommended and a new universal definition of 'clearance' was agreed. In late 1996 the principles proposed in Denmark were developed by a UN-led working group into *International Standards for Humanitarian Mine Clearance Operations*. A first edition of these standards was issued by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in March 1997.

In October 1999, UNMAS initiated a review of the original standards. This was done primarily for two reasons. Firstly, it was agreed when the original standards were drafted that they would be re-examined every 2-3 years in order to incorporate ongoing developments in operational procedures, practices and technology. Secondly, we became aware of concerns amongst the mine action community that the original standards did not address all the issues, and that they were inconsistent in their approach.

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) undertook the management of the project on behalf of UNMAS, and the process commenced in earnest with the first meeting of the User Focus Group (UFG) at James Madison University in the USA in October 1999. The Project Managers have visited field programmes to discuss the initial drafts with potential users first hand, and the IMAS have been discussed, reviewed and revised at 18 international or national meetings. A total of 27 standards have now been produced and reviewed by the UFG.

IMAS have been developed to be compatible with the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) standards and guides which are accepted by national bodies from over 138 countries.. Adopting the ISO format and language provides some significant advantages, including consistency of layout, use of internationally recognised terminology, and a greater acceptance by international, national and

regional organizations who are accustomed to the ISO series of standards and guides. It should also provide the opportunity for IMAS to be accepted and adopted in due course as mature ISO standards.

Some of the revised standards will require new procedures to be put in place before they can be fully implemented; some will require a change in attitude or approach. Many will see no significant change to the way operations are currently conducted. However, we recognised that an effective and appropriate outreach programme was essential, involving discussion, training and practical support. This will ensure the smooth introduction of the standards as they are adopted as National Standards, or utilised in the development of agreements and contracts. Adrian Wilkinson, the GICHD IMAS Project Manager, will discuss the outreach process shortly.

The outreach programme is scheduled to be completed in September 2001, with the standards formally introduced on 1 October. Regarding the status of the document in relation to the UN, it is intended that the status of IMAS as an official UN document be approved by the Secretary-General, on the basis of advice from the Inter-Agency Coordination Group. The Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly will make reference to the document, and it will be open to Member States to comment during discussion in the General Assembly. Given the time required to translate the document into all official UN languages, once approved by the Secretary-General in English, it will not be possible for the General Assembly to make substantive comment this year. This must wait until 2002.

Member States may still make comment on IMAS at any time via the normal review and revision process which Adrian Wilkinson will address during his presentation. Of course, Member States will still be able to *welcome* completion of the process and to *look forward* to debate in 2002.

I will now hand over the floor to the GICHD Project Manager Adrian Wilkinson to discuss the outreach programme, and to provide clarification on some technical issues.