

Statement by Ms. Pierrette Vu Thi
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On behalf of the UN Mine Action Team to the 7th Meeting of States Parties
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Thank you Madame President and good morning/afternoon to all distinguished delegates, participants and guests.

Madame President, you and your colleagues will recall that at the Inter-Sessionals held in May, we presented a UN Inter-Agency Mine Action Strategy for the 5-year period 2006-2010, which in turn would provide full support for the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty (APMBT) and its implementation.

At this the 7th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty, the UN Mine Action Team, comprising 14 UN entities of the Secretariat, Agencies and Programmes, wish to take this opportunity to report on progress in implementation of the four strategic objectives of the UN Strategy, and to draw attention, however briefly, to the challenges which still lie ahead.

In doing so, I should like to emphasize that the over-arching goal of the UN is to reduce the humanitarian and socio-economic threats posed by landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), at which point UN assistance will no longer be necessary. The UN system will continue to work to ensure that national institutions, capacities and policies are in place to deal with the residual risks.

The Strategy is already being implemented in cooperation with national authorities and in partnership with our NGO colleagues, international and regional organizations, donor countries and organizations, and others. Detailed progress and challenges will be reported in other fora on a regular basis, so I wish only to note some brief highlights.

Strategic Objective 1 - Reduce death and injury by at least fifty percent

The importance of this objective is reinforced by the latest findings of the Landmine Monitor Report, which confirm that these deadly weapons continue to kill and maim in considerable numbers, and which in fact indicate that casualties have risen over the past year. Clearly there is much to be done to achieve a reduction in numbers.

For its part, the UN is involved in activities aimed at reducing death and injury from landmines and ERW, in more than 35 countries. Significant progress has been made and continues to be made through direct mine clearance, survey and area reduction work.

I would also like to offer some particular remarks about the current situation in Lebanon and its relevance to all that we are seeking to achieve in mine action. Even as open hostilities continued in July and August, the UN team and partners were moving quickly to identify clearance and mine risk education needs. In the immediate post-conflict period, the UN supported the

Government of Lebanon in the launch of a national mass media campaign to warn civilians of the risks posed by landmines and ERW, especially cluster bombs. The UN also continues to support the Government in priority clearance of the main refugee and IDP return areas, and will work with all partners in a concerted effort to minimize further casualties.

Strategic Objective 2 - Mitigate the risk to community livelihoods and expand freedom of movement and right to physical integrity for at least 80 percent of the most seriously affected communities

It is today widely recognized that beyond the immediate humanitarian threat, landmines and ERW hinder the early recovery of post-conflict societies and the normalization of life and livelihoods. It follows that clearance and other mine action needs of affected communities must feature in national priorities, if sustainable improvements in basic human rights such as freedom of movement, right to work, education, shelter and food, are to be achieved

For example, in Sudan more than 2,500 kilometres of arterial roads have been declared free from the threat of landmines and a further 8,000 kilometres will be dealt with this year. For the first time in many decades, it is now again possible to drive the north/south axis roads which connect Sudan to Kenya and Uganda. The positive effects on trade and commerce, employment, and most importantly on the safer movement of large numbers of returning communities and local populations, are incalculable.

This story is being repeated in many other parts of the world, where national governments, regional and local authorities, along with partners including the UN, are striving to achieve freedom of movement for their mine-affected communities.

Strategic Objective 3 - Integration of mine-action needs into national development and reconstruction plans and budgets in at least 15 countries

Many affected countries are receiving specific UN advice through capacity building projects on mainstreaming mine action into multi-sectoral planning and budgeting. The aims of these efforts are to secure the sustainability of mine action programmes through the inclusion of resource needs into national plans and budgets and to ensure the highest socio-economic impact of mine action and clearance activities.

The UN worked with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to introduce a public health approach to mine action whereby systems for the collection and dissemination of casualty data are integrated in public services. Technical support was provided to Iraq and the Russian Federation, and epidemiology and surveillance training will take place in Cambodia next month. In Ethiopia, the UN supported the government in integrating landmine victim assistance and disability programmes.

As you are aware, the General Assembly will consider in its 61st Annual Session, which begins this week, adopting a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Thanks to the long, sustained efforts of governments, and NGOs such as Landmine Survivors Network, this Convention will be a major step forward for the 600 million persons globally who are disabled,

including the hundreds of thousands of survivors of landmine and UXO incidents. We pledge to continue supporting states and other bodies in the care, rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration of mine victims. We also urge all States Parties to the APMBT to become party to this treaty once it is finalized.

Strategic Objective 4 - Assist the development of national institutions to manage the landmine/ERW threat, and at the same time prepare for residual response capacity in at least 15 countries

The Ninth Annual Meeting of National Mine Action Directors and UN Advisors was held in Geneva in July of this year, co-hosted by the UN and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian De-mining (GICHD). The meeting brought together 150 representatives of national programmes, UN entities and NGOs for intensive discussions and information-sharing around such key topics as national ownership, mainstreaming mine action into development, risk management and land release, transition and exit, and gender.

The UN team also supported the integration of mine risk education into regular school curricula and data gathering into the programmes of Ministries of Health. In support of these efforts, the UN manages several global partnership projects, which help strengthen the capacities of national mine action programmes. Global management training courses develop the management skills of national senior and mid-level programme managers.

Madame Chairperson, the achievement of nationally defined goals and objectives with little or no international assistance is our ultimate collective aim and it is reassuring to note that the process of national ownership continues to evolve. For example, in the last six months the President of Senegal signed two national decrees officially adopting a legal framework for mine action, setting up the mine action centre and defining the responsibilities of the national commission. In Sudan through a presidential decree, a national institutional framework was established which outlines the national coordination and implementation of mine action activities.

Finally, we wish to highlight that gender sensitivity permeates the entire UN Mine Action Strategy. In this regard, with the support of Canada and Denmark, the UN team led a workshop on gender equality and MA programmes in the UAE earlier this month. Delegations from the MA programmes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan, occupied Palestinian territory, Sudan and Yemen worked with donor and NGO representatives and gender experts to develop concrete action plans aimed at ensuring that mine action is undertaken in a way that encourages the participation of men and women, and with the distinct needs of men and women clearly in mind.

We conclude by emphasizing the unequivocal support of the United Nations for the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty and for its universalisation. The Treaty is the keystone of our collective efforts to rid the world of landmines, and an inspiration for mine action across the planet.

Thank you.