

**Mine Action Programme of Sri Lanka:  
Status and Challenges in Implementation  
Friday, 8 June 2018**

## **Introduction and participants**

On 8 June 2018, Sri Lanka and the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, with the support of the Implementation Support Unit, invited state and civil society representatives to engage on Sri Lanka's needs and challenges in mine action and in particular its efforts to complete its mine clearance commitments by 2020. Following a presentation by Sri Lanka, participants engaged in an informal discussion about possible avenues of cooperation and assistance in support of Sri Lanka's efforts. Participants received a package including an invitation, agenda and Sri Lanka's Presentation (delivered version attached). Where not publicly available, these can be obtained through the ISU ([isu@apminebanconvention.org](mailto:isu@apminebanconvention.org)) by those in a position to provide assistance.

### Participants

**States:** Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United States.

**Convention representatives:** Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit, Representative of the Committee on Victim assistance (Belgium), Representatives of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance (Thailand)

**Organizations:** HALO Trust, Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations Office for Project Services, DASH, SHARP.

## **Presentation**

Three decades of conflict in which mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other explosive devices were extensively used has left a significant level of mine and explosive remnants of war contamination in northern and eastern districts of Sri Lanka. To address this contamination the National Mine Action Programme (NMAP) was initiated in 2002 with the assistance of the international community with a focus on facilitating the safe resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). This continues to be a primary focus. In more recent times, mine action has also supported wider peace and reconciliation efforts by making agricultural land safe for productive use and allowing the development of national infrastructure. In 2010 the National Mine Action Centre (NMAC) was established within the Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, as the executive body of the NMAP to coordinate, evaluate and monitor the National Mine Action Strategy with the Regional Mine Action Office located in Northern Province providing Quality Assurance and Quality Control to all demining operations as well as task allocation and planning with District Authorities.

The NMAP of Sri Lanka is a synchronized and team effort which includes the Humanitarian Demining Units of the Army Corps of Engineers, two national clearance agencies (DASH and SHARP) and two international organizations (the HALO Trust and MAG). The priorities/vision includes a) rehabilitation and resettlement to cleared areas, peace building and development b) long term sustainable peace and c) the return of land as envisioned in the National HR Action Plan 2016-2021.

Since the establishment of the program, significant progress has been made with 964 square kilometres having been cancelled through non-technical survey and 137 square kilometres addressed through clearance. In addition to this a total of 1'100 square kilometres have been addressed through battle areas clearance activities. Through these efforts a total of 736,605 anti-personnel mines, 2,093 anti-tank mines and 558,836 items of UXO have been located and destroyed. In spite of this progress, Sri Lanka remains one of the most densely contaminated countries in the world with the remaining contamination located in close proximity to population centres.

Today, following a resurvey during the period of 2015-2017 during which 68 km<sup>2</sup> of suspect hazardous area was reduced to 28 km<sup>2</sup>, very accurate data is now available concerning the remaining contamination allowing for a district by district roadmap to completion. At present a total of 28 square kilometres remain to be addressed in the districts of Mannar, Vavuniya, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Emulative, Trincomalee and Amparo. Of the remaining contamination 90% is located in close proximity to villages and necessary infrastructure. In addition to this, approximately 100,000 IDPs and refugees in India and other countries are waiting to return to their lands and livelihoods which in many cases area affected by mines and ERW.

With the use of historic data, Sri Lanka has been able to project timelines and costs to reach completion by 2020. The Government of Sri Lanka has indicated that for 2019 the government will increase its contribution to just under USD 5 million per year until 2020. In addition to the national contribution, international contributions from Canada, Australia, Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States equal to USD 6.9 million have been secured for the period of 2018-2020. These states were recognized for their support. However, the Programme has determined that an additional USD 12 Million from the international community is required to meet the ultimate goal of completion.

Although the rate of accidents has declined by 96% from 2010 to 2017 and 2 civilian casualties recorded in 2017, with much of the contamination in close proximity to many population centres mine risk education (MRE) activities led by UNICEF must continue to ensure the casualty rates do not increase. In this respect the Ministry of Education has taken steps to integrate MRE into school curriculum and 156 village mine action committees have been established and are actively functioning. MRE work must also continue to warn the population of the risk of residual contamination.

Concerning victim assistance, the NMAC has appointed a victim assistance officer and has started work in this area by raising awareness on victim assistance as an obligation among partners such as the Ministry of Social Empowerment and the Ministry of Health. The NMAC in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Services, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health has also started a comprehensive needs assessment of mine victim and plans to complete this assessment by December 2018. The NMAS is also planning to develop a data base on victim assistance. The Ministry of Social Services and ministry of health will designate victim assistance focal points in this year and funding for victim assistance will be increase in in 2019. It is estimated that USD 160,000 per year will be required for victim assistance activities. Sri Lanka also highlighted that it is a member of Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities and that synergies in their work in this area can be taken advantage of.

In conclusion Sri Lanka indicated that 2020 is realistic and achievable, the strategy and plans for completion are in place, the remaining contamination is of high impact (close to communities), there is a serious commitment and synchronized effort between the government and operators and the needs and requirements have been identified.

**Additional information by operators and others working in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan Army: The Sri Lankan Army Humanitarian Demining Unit (SLAHDU) are funded completely by the Government of Sri Lanka. The SLAHDU is using the complete tool box in its operations including manual, mechanical, and Mine Detection Dogs (MDD). Clearance operations are carried out in line with the priority of the NMAC. Once the proactive clearance is completed, there will be a residual contamination which will be continuously addressed by the SLA HDU. Steps are already being taken to ensure that relevant employees and expertise of the NMAC including maintenance of the data base can be carried out by the SLAHDU. The current strategy sees the disposal of Explosive Ordnance with the Sri Lankan Army deployed for EOD operation covering all conflict affected districts for as long as the EO support is required. This EOD capacity is also supporting all other agencies working in Sri Lanka. The SLA-HDU will continue its engagement to ensure that residual threat area identified including through hotlines, building capacity of local police and government administrative representatives, and MRE programmes with relevant agencies to continue educating the population on the threat.

HALO Trust: with the generous support of Canada, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, has cleared 14.33 kn2 to date in Jaffna, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu Districts addressing 778 minefields and aiding the settlement of over 122,000 families including entire villages. HALO's work in Sri Lanka has also supported the restoration of railway lines to Jaffna. In the areas where HALO is currently operating a total of 4.41 km2 remains, with Jaffna District estimated to be completed by the end of 2018. The remaining areas are high priority with over 700 displaced families awaiting resettlement.

DASH: is a local organization with a workforce of 350 people exclusively recruited from mine affected areas. To date Dash has addressed 10.7 kn2 resulting in the identification and destruction of 74,396 anti-personnel mines, 164 anti-tank mines and 20,871 items of UXO. At present DASH has 11 demining teams. However, this amount will be reduced to 9 teams due to shortage of funds starting in January 2019. In order to clear the remaining 2.6 million square meters in DASH's area of operations by 2020 it will be necessary to increase to 14 demining team during the period of 2018-2020. This will require approximately USD 2.6 million in addition to what it anticipates from current donors. Dash is thankful for the contributions from the United States, Japan and Australia.

SHARP: SHARP is the newest and smallest local NGO operating in Sri Lanka. Since its establishment in March 2016, with the contribution from the government of Japan, SHARP has been to address a total of 652,221 square meters leading to the detection and destruction of 1,491 anti-personnel mines and 1,092 items of unexploded ordnance. The impact of these efforts includes over 500 acres of land made safe for agricultural use, firewood collection and cattle grazing. Additionally, these efforts have addressed road networks providing access to school, river sand collection and the fishing industry. In order for SHARP to address the remaining contamination in its area of operation by 2020, it would require USD 3.6 million for 2018-2020. While it has already secured USD 2.1 million it faces a funding gap of USD 1.5 million.

MAG: Mine action activities continue to have a real impact on development in Sri Lanka with 100,168 IDPs having been returned, agricultural land returned to productive use, in particular the rice producing northern province which produces approximately 80,000 Mt per year of rice, areas cleared for the upgrading of the power grid and the new National Park created in June 2015 having benefited from the clearance of 18 confirmed mine fields with 16 remaining inside the National Park. MAG assesses that Sri Lanka is making good progress with resettlement a prime concern.

GICHD: Facilitated the drafting of Sri Lanka's new mine action strategy, noted strong national ownership, and good cooperation among stakeholders. The work on the mid-term review of the Strategy took place in April 2018 and, as with the timeline agreed, should be ready in July 2018.

## **Discussion**

States and organization expressed their appreciation for Sri Lanka having made the important decision of acceding to the Convention and for their engagement and commitment to implementing their commitments under Article 5 by 2020, well before their official deadline under Article 5 and the 2025 aspirational deadline of the States Parties. Participants also expressed the important role Sri Lanka's completion could play in the life of the Convention and as a model for implementation. Participants also shared their appreciation for the detailed presentation offered by Sri Lanka and were happy to note the working relationship between the national authorities and the operators.

Participants recognized that the gap in funding of \$12.7M is a relatively small amount of money but critical for Sri Lanka to be able to address its remaining contamination by 2020 and that this will have a positive benefit overall for the Convention. Participants encouraged States in a position to provide support to do so in order to ensure that Sri Lanka can finalize its mine clearance efforts by 2020. One State indicated that they had recently reengaged with Sri Lanka and would be providing support over the next two years to MAG and DASH totalling approximately CHF 525'000. This news was warmly welcomed.

Participants recognized that the remaining challenge in Sri Lanka had a significant humanitarian and development impact. Participants had some question concerning the number of people the remaining displaced and the amount of agricultural land that remains affected by anti-personnel mines. Sri Lanka indicated that the number of people include both IDPs and refugees currently located in India. It was also shared that there remain more than 45,000 IDPs and a further 60,000 refugees awaiting return, which is being done in a phased manner.

Participants congratulated Sri Lanka for the initiative to host a meeting of the Individualized Approach and praised the importance of the IA to the implementation of the Convention. One state inquired as to Sri Lanka's intentions for next steps in this IA process and about the possibility of a subsequent meeting in Colombo.

Participants further indicated the importance of Sri Lanka continuing to make progress in implementation of its victim assistance commitments and the importance of Sri Lanka developing a comprehensive victim assistance action plan for implementation of the Convention's Maputo Action Plan commitments.

### **Follow up**

Questions about the Mine Action Program in Sri Lanka should be directed to:

**Mr. Mahinda Bandara Wickramasingha, Assistant Director, National Mine Action Centre,**  
[kgmbwickramasingha@gmail.com](mailto:kgmbwickramasingha@gmail.com)