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Briefing on Information Management and Mine Action Standards in the Context of Peacekeeping Operations

By Ambassador Martin Dahinden
Director, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) supports the efforts of the international community in reducing the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). It provides operational assistance, is active in research, and supports the implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (AP MBC). The Centre provides a wide range of services, such as advisory missions, training, evaluation and technical support to mine affected countries, donor governments, the United Nations, other international agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Two areas of our work are particularly important to peacekeeping. They are: information management and mine action standards. Also relevant is a recently completed study on The Role of the Military in Mine Action, which was requested by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

Information Management

Timely and accurate information on the threat of mines and UXO is of vital importance for the conduct of peacekeeping operations and to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as for post-conflict reconstruction. Typically, a wide range of different actors like the military, local authorities, international agencies and non-governmental organisations, need such information to pursue their tasks.

To be effective, it is critical to enable the different actors to collect and exchange information on the threat of mines in a standardized way. It is also important to handle and share this information across the different phases of crisis management and reconstruction. Until recently, this has rarely been done in a satisfactory way.

Over the past few years, together with the UN Mine Action Service, the GICHD has developed and made available the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). This is a computer based tool for the standardised collection, storage, analysis and dissemination of data on the mine and UXO threat. The system now runs in thirty six countries or programmes, and is mainly applied in post-conflict situations. However, it is very important for mine action that data handling is done in an interoperable way from the beginning. This is why the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, at its fifty-seventh session, encouraged troop-contributing countries to make use of the IMSMA information management system.¹

In the peacekeeping context, IMSMA is today used by UNIFIL in Lebanon (since 2001), by UNMEE in Eritrea/Ethiopia (since 2001), by UNFICYP in

¹ A/57/767, para. 145

Cyprus (since 2002) and MINURSO in Western Sahara (since 2003). It is also in use by the ISAF in Afghanistan (since 2002) and in Iraq (since 2003).

The Geneva Centre provides pre-deployment and post-deployment support for the IMSMA system, which is largely funded by the Swiss government. The support includes training, technical assistance for the system installation and set-up, the transfer of existing data sources to IMSMA if necessary, and follow up maintenance and support. As with any professional software, there is continuous development work undertaken, and the system is available in a range of languages.² The ownership and control of the data is of course with the user.

It is encouraging to see that the military forces of more and more troop contributing countries are conducting IMSMA training programmes themselves, such as France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Likewise, most international mine action non-governmental organizations (NGO's) are familiar with the system and use it.

Mine Action Standards

Another major and relevant area of work of the GICHD is the development of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), which are prepared by the GICHD under a mandate from the United Nations. The standards have two very important purposes: (1) they help to improve quality in mine action, and (2) they facilitate cooperation among the different actors. Since the standards have become widely applied, there is now a common terminology, shared conceptual thinking, and training and education have

² English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, with Russian under preparation.

improved. In short, there is now much better interoperability and mutual understanding among the different humanitarian mine action actors.

In his recent Report to the General Assembly the Secretary-General has recommended that “*countries contributing troops to peacekeeping operations with expertise in explosive ordnance disposal and mine clearance should ensure that operations are conducted in accordance with IMAS*”.³

The potential benefits of the international standards for peacekeeping operations would be to improve interoperability between the engineer contingents of troop contributing nations, and to ensure that areas demined by them do not have to be cleared again at a later stage. Peacekeepers mainly clear mines in support of their mission, however, it is important that this work is performed according to agreed standards, and then recorded in a common format.

In the past, the mine action activities of peacekeeping operations have often been the origins of subsequent national mine action programmes, but these transitions could have gone more smoothly had there been agreed standards already in place. In cases like Eritrea and Lebanon, where there are mine action activities being conducted by a national authority in most parts of the country, but other tasks being undertaken by peacekeeping troops in a mandated zone, the need for common standards is even more critical.

In addition to the technical elaboration of the Standards, the Geneva Centre is about to expand its outreach and training programme, with the main effort directed toward helping mine affected countries continue to implement IMAS. The GICHD also works closely with the military to disseminate the international standards. As an example, next week the

³ A/58/260, para. 60

Centre will be holding a workshop in Santiago at the request of the Government of Chile. Training courses and workshops have been held with NATO staff officers' courses, as well as through the Partnership for Peace programme. The Centre has recently conducted training on IMAS with the armed forces of the Ukraine, to support their mine action efforts with UNIFIL. Like the information management system, training on the international standards has been conducted by a number of armies for their own use.

The Role of the Military in Mine Action

The most appropriate role for the military in mine action has been the subject of debate in both civilian and military circles for some time. At the request of UNMAS, the Geneva Centre has recently completed a study into this issue. The study found that the military expertise in breaching minefields is not easily transposed to humanitarian demining, where nothing less than 100 per cent clearance is acceptable if land is to be returned safely to civilian populations. While the military are able to provide warnings to civilians about the dangers of mines and UXO, they are not well prepared to undertake ongoing community based awareness and education campaigns. In general, military peacekeeping troops have not carried out large scale survey, marking or mine clearance operations.

In many countries, the national mine action response has been based around the military, although this was found to be most effective when aspects like priority setting and quality control were under civilian control. The destruction of stockpiled mines by States parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (AP MBC) has usually been completed successfully by their own military forces.

Conclusion

The recent global experience in crisis management and peacekeeping operations has shown that all these emergencies involve a wide range of different actors. It has also proven that the success of an overall operation depends largely on the capability to manage a smooth transition to the post conflict phase, as the international military presence dismantles. Information management, international standards, and also a better understanding of capabilities and limitations of the military in such situations, can significantly improve the effectiveness of mine action and contribute to a smooth transition. This is what the Geneva Centre is committed to achieve, in partnership with the United Nations, and we stand ready to assist as required.

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