



NATIONAL MINE ACTION STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO WITH SUPPORT FROM THE GICHD

The Democratic Republic of Congo, previously known as Zaire, covers 2.34 million sq km, is home to a population of over 62.6 million people and is considered one of the biggest countries in Africa. It gained independence from Belgium in 1960 but went through years of turmoil which ended in 2003 with the creation of a transitional government. Presidential and parliamentary elections took place in 2006. However renewed violence continues in the east and north east of the country as well as sporadic violence elsewhere.

In order to stabilize the country the UN has deployed since 2001 the largest mission in the department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO) known as the Mission des Nations Unies en RDC (MONUC). This mission coordinates the work of the UN in DRC and the transition process.

It is recognized that years of war and civil unrest have left the country contaminated by mines and ERW. However, neither the full extent and impact on the population, nor the number of casualties are fully known.

In order to tackle the mine/ERW issue, MONUC established the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC DRC) in 2002. At the same time, the government created a National Commission to Fight Antipersonnel Mines. Further legislation developments took place in the first quarter of 2008, with the issue of two decrees by the Minister of Interior that established a National Focal Point and a new inter-ministerial mine action commission. However, despite the efforts made on a national level, the UNMACC continues to coordinate all mine action activities conducted by three international NGOs, one commercial company and several national MRE NGOs.

In March 2007, the UNMACC DRC approached GICHD and formally requested support for the development of National Mine Action Standards. The GICHD discussed with UNMACC the specific support required and tailored its response in three phases:

- 1 Identification of key mine action areas of interventions and production of first draft
- 2 Discussion of the first draft document, adjustments and endorsement
- 3 Dissemination and implementation.

The first visit by the GICHD to DR Congo was conducted in mid-June 2008 in order to commence the first phase of support to the development of National Mine Action Standards. During two weeks, support was provided to operations and management staff of the UNMACC. A workshop was also held in Kinshasa, which brought together all mine action stakeholders. They identified key areas for mine action in DRC and analyzed the current situation regarding contamination. This analysis led to a discussion based on IMAS of what topics needed to be covered in the NMAS. The results of these two weeks were the set-up of the future national standards' framework, the establishment of a management team, as well as technical working groups to draft various national standards and an agreed time-frame.

In the second phase of the NMAS development process, planned to start in November 2008, the GICHD will continue with the desk review of the first draft version of NMAS DRC, followed by a series of activities. These will include the implementation of a second workshop where each technical working group will present their chapters to the rest of the stakeholders. Afterwards, a final version will be drafted and presented to the UNMACC DRC and the National government. The first phase will concentrate on the dissemination and implementation of NMAS DRC version 1.



The Team working on the National Mine Action Standards Development Process

It is important to highlight that the NMAS are being drafted in French (official language of DRC). This has allowed DRC nationals to be included more effectively in the discussion process. All stakeholders showed real interest and commitment in developing national standards. As a result, the representatives of the government, NGOs and UNMACC welcomed this exercise not only as good for establishing standards, but also as a tool to boost coordination and capacity building in DRC, two key conditions for strengthening national ownership.

The DRC faces many challenges ahead in Mine Action and the GICHD remains committed to continue their support and is on call for any additional requests.

For further information on the development of National Mine Action Standards and the support the GICHD can provide, please contact Faiz Paktian, Head of Standards and Quality Management, f.paktian@gichd.org or visit GICHD website.

|