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Assistance in mine action

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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, covering the period from August 2017 to July 2019, is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/75](#) on assistance in mine action. It highlights significant trends in mine action and some of the key achievements of members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, chaired by the Mine Action Service. It provides the final report on the implementation of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018 and introduces the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023.

2. The year 2019 marks the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, a critical instrument of international law and a successful humanitarian disarmament instrument. It also marks the thirtieth anniversary of the signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is relevant given that children are disproportionately impacted by explosive ordnance.¹

3. Over the reporting period, violent conflict has continued to wreak havoc in countries and among communities and families worldwide. In 2018, the United Nations recorded the violent death and injury of more than 22,800 civilians owing to armed conflict in six countries alone (see [S/2019/373](#)). Despite the progress made in stigmatizing the use of landmines and other explosive ordnance against civilian personnel and infrastructure, such use continues to be reported and alleged in a number of conflicts. All kinds of explosive ordnance pose a deadly threat to girls, boys, women and men living in conflict-affected areas, hindering access to

* [A/74/150](#).

¹ According to the International Mine Action Standards, “the term ‘explosive ordnance’ refers to all munitions containing explosives, nuclear fission or fusion materials and biological and chemical agents. This includes bombs and warheads; guided and ballistic missiles; artillery, mortar, rocket and small arms ammunition; all mines, torpedoes and depth charges; pyrotechnics; cluster bombs and dispensers; cartridge and propellant actuated devices; electro-explosive devices; clandestine and improvised explosive devices; and all similar or related items or components explosive in nature.” See: http://www.mineactionstandards.org/fileadmin/user_upload/imas_archives/IMAS-09-30-Ed2-Aml.pdf.



humanitarian aid and socioeconomic development and undermining the establishment of sustainable peace and progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

4. After a steady decrease between 1999 and 2012, there has been a sharp rise in casualties from explosive ordnance since 2013. At the global level, nearly 20 people fell victim to explosive ordnance every day in 2017. Almost half of the victims were children.²

5. The data collected by the monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018 provide further insights into the countries and territories where the United Nations carries out mine action. In the 12 countries and territories where data have been consistently available since 2015,³ explosive ordnance casualties decreased by 32 per cent overall between 2015 and 2018.⁴ In the majority of those countries and territories, fewer than 100 casualties are now recorded per year. However, in 2018, when data became available for countries such as the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, overall casualty figures increased.⁵ The highest number of reported casualties in 2018 was in the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by Afghanistan and Yemen. In 2018, data showed that 41 per cent of casualties were caused by explosive remnants of war, 29 per cent by anti-personnel mines and 21 per cent by victim-operated improvised explosive devices. It is also worth noting that over 80 per cent of reported casualties were boys and men. The United Nations analysed the data to shape its responses and guide the development of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023, in order to ensure its effectiveness given the realities on the ground.

6. Another recent trend highlighted by the data is the significant proportion of casualties caused by improvised explosive devices, including those that are victim-operated. The scale, lethality, sophistication and evolving designs of improvised explosive devices continue to present specific technical and operational challenges and have required experts in the field to significantly adjust their operations. Furthermore, in the context of the current urbanization of warfare, aggravated by the increase in the duration and intensity of conflicts, explosive remnants of war continue to inflict a heavy toll on civilians.

II. Update on international legal instruments related to mine action

7. There is no alternative to universalization and strict compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law to ensure protection.

Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

8. To date, 125 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, Afghanistan being the most recent country to accede to it. Moreover, 105 States are parties to the Protocol on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby Traps and Other Devices

² International Campaign to Ban Landmines, *Landmine Monitor 2018* (2018).

³ Abyei, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Colombia, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, State of Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Sudan.

⁴ From 3,114 casualties in 2015 to 125 in 2018.

⁵ From 4,039 casualties in 2017 to 5,003 in 2018.

as amended on 3 May 1996 (Amended Protocol II), and 95 States are parties to the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War (Protocol V). I call upon States that have not yet acceded to the Convention and its Protocols to do so urgently, and I call upon the States parties to comply fully with all their obligations under those instruments.

9. Given the multifaceted challenges posed by the increased use of improvised explosive devices, the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II exchanged information and approaches to protect civilians, including clearance methods and risk education. The United Nations contributed with technical presentations on the humanitarian impact and presented the preliminary findings of the mapping by the Mine Action Service of the impact of such devices on the Organization and its ability to respond. The High Contracting Parties to Protocol V must comply with all its provisions, including those on the clearance of explosive remnants of war, victim assistance and the recording, retaining and transmission of information (art. 4). This is essential to protect civilians, speed up clearance, enable the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance, improve the operational effectiveness of peace operations and establish the foundations for rehabilitation and reconstruction. Universalization of the Convention and its Protocols and compliance with them are key to the progress of States towards durable peace and sustainable development. I renew my call for the universalization and implementation of legal commitments and urge States parties to fully comply with article 4. In the same spirit, I call on the High Contracting Parties to address the long-term humanitarian consequences of the use of mines other than anti-personnel mines.

Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

10. To date, 164 countries have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. I congratulate Sri Lanka and the State of Palestine on acceding to the Convention in December 2017. I continue to strongly encourage States not yet parties to the Convention to accede to it at the earliest opportunity.

11. On the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention, I congratulate the 31 States that have declared their countries cleared of all known anti-personnel mines, including Mauritania, which completed its clearance obligation in 2018. I also congratulate Oman on fulfilling its stockpile destruction obligations in 2018. To date, around 52 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines have been destroyed; 161 of the 164 States parties no longer hold stockpiled anti-personnel mines, while 3 States parties⁶ are in the process of destroying their stocks.

12. The Fourth Review Conference, to be held in Oslo in November 2019, will provide an opportunity to review the operation and status of the Convention and reinvigorate commitment to its implementation. The United Nations has substantially contributed to the draft Oslo action plan for 2020–2024. I hope that the Conference, which I will convene, will instil renewed impetus to fully implement the Convention with clear commitments and benchmarks to measure progress.

Convention on Cluster Munitions

13. During the reporting period, four States acceded to the Convention, bringing the total number of States parties to 106. I congratulate again the Gambia, Namibia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka for becoming States parties.

14. The Dubrovnik Action Plan for 2015–2020 continues to guide the efforts and commitments of States parties to achieve a world free of cluster munitions by 2030.

⁶ Greece, Sri Lanka and Ukraine.

All 11 States parties, which were obliged to destroy their stockpiles under article 3 by 1 August 2018, complied ahead of that deadline. I also congratulate Botswana, Croatia, Cuba, Spain and Switzerland, which completed the destruction of their stockpiles during the period under review.

15. At the seventh meeting of States parties to the Convention, held in Geneva in September 2017, the “country coalition” concept was adopted to boost implementation of the Convention through enhanced donor coordination and partnerships. Three country coalitions have been established to date.⁷

16. I continue to be deeply concerned by reports and allegations of the use of cluster munitions by States not parties to the Convention. I urge that any such use end immediately, and I renew my call for States to accede to the Convention without delay. I also urge States parties to reinforce the prevailing stigma against the use of cluster munitions.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

17. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires States parties to ensure that victims of explosive ordnance have access to health care, rehabilitation, employment, social protection and education. A total of 179 States are now parties to the Convention,⁸ and 96 States are parties to its Optional Protocol.

18. At its twentieth session, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities established a working group to develop guidance for the implementation of article 11, on ensuring the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies (see [CRPD/C/20/2](#), para. 7). In its general comment on articles 4 (3) and 33 (3), the Committee further recognized that victims of landmines should be taken into consideration and consulted on all decision-making procedures related to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities under the Convention (see [CRPD/C/GC/7](#), para. 50).

19. During the reporting period, there was an increase in dialogue between the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Committee on Victim Assistance under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, with a view to universalizing both conventions.

III. Final report on the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018

20. During the period covered by the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2013–2018, the United Nations adapted its mine action programming in response to evolving contexts and challenges. Responsibility for and ownership of mine action programmes were transferred to national authorities in five countries. During the same period, seven new programmes were established.⁹

⁷ Botswana, Lebanon and Montenegro.

⁸ During the reporting period, Chad, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Monaco, Somalia and Tajikistan acceded to the Convention.

⁹ The following country programmes have been closed: Algeria (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2018), Côte d’Ivoire (Mine Action Service, 2017), Egypt (UNDP, 2018), Mozambique (UNDP, 2015), Nepal (United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2015). The following country programmes have been added: Iraq (Mine Action Service, 2015), Myanmar (UNICEF, 2013), Niger (UNICEF, 2015), Nigeria (UNDP, 2017), Syrian Arab Republic (Mine Action Service, 2015), Viet Nam (UNDP, 2018) and Yemen (UNDP, 2015).

21. Even after States have fulfilled their clearance obligations, residual contamination and the impact of explosive ordnance endure for decades, necessitating a national response capacity, sustainable risk education and victim assistance. Creating conditions conducive to the full and dignified reintegration of survivors in society must be a priority for all, affected and non-affected States alike. The Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023 features victim assistance as a key strategic priority, with a special focus on establishing referral pathways, in line with the United Nations Policy on Victim Assistance in Mine Action. Greater coordination with other sectors, such as health and development, is necessary to ensure a multisectoral response. I call upon all States to dedicate the resources – human, financial and technological – necessary to promote victims’ rights and assistance for survivors of explosive ordnance.

Strategic objective 1: risks to individuals and the socioeconomic impacts of mines and explosive remnants of war, including cluster munitions, are reduced

22. Reducing risks from explosive ordnance requires a well-coordinated and comprehensive response to mine action, implemented through effective partnerships with national authorities and civil society. During the reporting period, the United Nations strengthened its coordination at the global level through the mine action area of responsibility within the Global Protection Cluster. At the field level, humanitarian mine action coordination mechanisms were active within the protection cluster in 15 countries.

23. In recent years, there has been some notable success in reducing explosive ordnance casualties in a number of countries. The casualty rate in Cambodia in 2018 was almost half that of 2015,¹⁰ and in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, where the efficiency of clearance operations was enhanced, including through a new evidence-based survey methodology, the casualty rate decreased by more than 90 per cent from 2008 to 2018; both countries have received long-term mine action support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In Mali, the Mine Action Service coordinated clearance and risk education in conflict-affected communities in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and civil society, contributing to a reduction of casualties due to explosive remnants of war of almost 70 per cent from 2012 to 2018. In Sri Lanka, after decades of integrated mine action efforts by the Government, the United Nations and civil society, no civilian casualties from explosive ordnance were reported in 2018, for the first time in more than 30 years.

24. In some contexts, the United Nations is primarily focused on risk education. In 2018, UNICEF provided training in risk education to more than 10,000 professionals in 16 countries, including teachers, child protection workers and religious leaders. In addition, the UNICEF-led explosive ordnance risk education online forum, a platform for sharing good practices and technical guidance, grew to comprise 300 members from more than 60 countries. Reflecting how risk education can support other aspects of mine action, in Cambodia mine risk education was linked to increased community reporting of contamination, leading to the destruction of over 10,000 explosive ordnance devices. In Mali, on 15 November 2018, the Mine Action Service and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs organized a workshop on the humanitarian impact of explosive ordnance, which involved 34 national and international non-governmental organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and entities of the United Nations system, resulting in the development of tailored information products, such as monthly explosive ordnance overviews. Following a spike in the number of civilian casualties from improvised explosive

¹⁰ From 111 casualties in 2015 to 58 in 2018.

devices in the central regions of Mali, the Service developed a rapid response mechanism to assist survivors and their families and delivered targeted risk awareness sessions for drivers working in humanitarian contexts to mitigate the potential impact on such operations.

25. In July 2018, the Mine Action Service deployed an emergency response team in north-eastern Nigeria, at the request of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. The Service leads the mine action area of responsibility jointly with the Nigerian authorities and is fully integrated into the activities of the humanitarian country team. Through such effective coordination, information-gathering requirements were streamlined so that the most relevant and up-to-date information was available for mine action planning and prioritization. Risk education was prioritized given the high levels of displacement in the region. In 2018, the United Nations provided risk education to over 195,000 children.

26. In the Syrian Arab Republic, over 10.2 million individuals, including 3.3 million children, are reported to live in communities contaminated with explosive ordnance.¹¹ Explosive remnants of war were recorded as the leading cause of child casualties during the second half of 2018, accounting for 434 reported deaths and injuries that year.¹² The United Nations is engaged in extensive risk education efforts, and more than 2 million individuals were reached in 2018 by humanitarian mine action organizations.

27. In Ukraine, where half a million people live within 5 km of the heavily contaminated contact line,¹³ UNICEF reached more than 610,000 children with an animated risk education video developed by a local youth team.

28. In several countries, the number of casualties from explosive ordnance has risen. Although the Mine Action Service coordinated the clearance of more than 7 km² in 45 communities in Afghanistan during the reporting period, an average of 118 explosive ordnance victims were recorded each month in 2018,¹⁴ more than three times the level in 2012. In Colombia, prompted by an upsurge in accidents in 2018, UNICEF developed a prioritization system to deliver risk education to communities most at risk, while the Mine Action Service financed emergency risk education activities to respond rapidly to the trend. In Myanmar, the number of casualties increased by more than 50 per cent from 2017 to 2018,¹⁵ as a result of both the ongoing conflict and improved surveillance. UNICEF provided risk education to more than 141,000 girls, boys, women and men by training over 600 teachers and 300 community educators from the most affected regions. Even in post-conflict contexts, casualties can rise because people are driven to high-risk activities, such as collecting scrap metal. In Albania, the number of unexploded ordnance hotspots decreased from 19 to 2 over the time frame of the Strategy, but accidents have risen in recent years.

29. One of the key objectives of mine action is to establish safe access and conditions for voluntary returns of internally displaced persons and refugees. In Abyei, more than 850,000 m² of land were released by the Mine Action Service,¹⁶

¹¹ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic* (2019).

¹² UNICEF, monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

¹³ See briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine, 25 April 2019 (see [S/PV.8516](#)).

¹⁴ This refers to mines, explosive remnants of war and victim-operated improvised explosive devices, recorded as pressure-plated improvised explosive devices by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

¹⁵ From 176 casualties in 2017 to 276 in 2018.

¹⁶ Land release refers to a variety of processes whereby land suspected of being contaminated with explosive ordnance is released back to local communities. It may include non-technical surveys, technical surveys and clearance work.

enabling displaced populations to return home safely, facilitating access for humanitarian actors and allowing greater freedom of movement for nomadic populations with their livestock. In Iraq, in line with government and United Nations priorities, the Mine Action Service supports safe, durable and voluntary returns and the restoration of basic services. This has included 1,250 UNDP-led rehabilitation and reconstruction projects involving hospitals, schools, roads, bridges, water treatment plants and electrical power lines. As a result of underwater clearance of explosive ordnance, the Fallujah bridge was reconstructed, cutting the travel time for residents on the east of the river to the city's only maternity hospital from two hours to five minutes. The Mine Action Service provided risk education via radio, text messaging and virtual reality goggles, targeting 1,100 humanitarian personnel and 8,300 workers removing rubble. Also in Iraq, UNICEF reached over 600,000 children with risk education in 2018.

30. There was demonstrable progress in reducing the socioeconomic risks of explosive ordnance contamination, accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. In Cambodia, 32 km² of land were released with assistance from UNDP. Some 80 per cent of the land was subsequently used for agriculture, supporting progress towards Goals 1, 2, 8 and 11. In the Central African Republic, the Mine Action Service safely disposed of hand grenades scattered around a school attended by 400 students and a court of justice, thereby supporting Goals 4 and 16. Working in close partnership with the Government of Colombia, the United Nations and other partners, the Mine Action Service enabled access to productive opportunities for almost 20,000 women, girls, boys and men through the release of land suspected to be contaminated, supporting Goal 8 by diversifying options for income generation, including agricultural production and ecotourism initiatives. In eastern parts of the Sudan, all known landmines and explosive remnants of war were cleared, providing 700 households with access to grazing lands for their livestock and thus accelerating progress towards Goals 1 and 2. In support of Goal 4, a secondary school was built in the village of Hamdayat after the clearance of 10 minefields. In South Sudan, more than 44 km² were released, enabling access to 40 schools, 42 medical facilities and 285 water points, supporting Goals 3, 4 and 6. The clearance of critical routes and a new food distribution centre also allowed the World Food Programme to deliver humanitarian assistance to at-risk communities in the greater Upper Nile region.

31. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Mine Action Service cleared explosive ordnance from several United Nations facilities in Gaza, including the compound of the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the UNICEF desalination plant and a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, where an unexploded tank shell was found in a classroom. The Service also reached over 8,500 households with conflict preparedness training for at-risk populations.

32. In Somalia, the Mine Action Service developed a community-based project along the border with Ethiopia, releasing more than six square kilometres of land and reaching over 48,000 individuals, 70 per cent of whom were children, with risk education. The employment provided by the project supported more than 240 Somali men and women, almost 40 of whom were younger than 30 years, offering stable incomes to more than 400 households and 2,500 individuals.

33. In Yemen, approximately 26.4 million people live in governorates potentially contaminated by explosive ordnance,¹⁷ which constitutes the third leading cause of

¹⁷ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, Yemen* (2018).

child casualties.¹⁸ The urbanization and intensity of the ongoing conflict, as well as the types of weapons used, make clearance extremely complex. In response, the Humanitarian Coordinator activated a mine action area of responsibility to strengthen coordination. The United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement is incorporating a technical adviser to strengthen its mine action capacity. UNDP, through its partner the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, released more than 11 km² of land, destroying more than 12,000 anti-tank mines, almost 2,200 anti-personnel mines, 1,700 victim-operated improvised explosive devices, 237 cluster munitions and 210,000 pieces of unexploded ordnance, thereby enabling humanitarian access. Furthermore, UNICEF supported national authorities and other partners in delivering large-scale risk education campaigns. In 2018, the campaigns reached more than 1.5 million people, including more than 1 million children, in 20 governorates, in particular those areas with high levels of displacement. In some areas, such as Amanat al-Asimah, Aden, Ibb, Amran and Dhamar, a decrease in the number of child casualties was observed following risk education programmes.

Strategic objective 2: comprehensive support is provided by national and international actors to mine and explosive remnants of war victims within broader responses to injury and disability

34. Ensuring comprehensive and sustainable support for the victims of explosive ordnance is a major challenge in conflict-affected countries, where public health and social support systems are strained by limited resources. The United Nations is focused on supporting national structures and enhancing capacities. In some emergency situations, however, more direct support is provided through partnerships with civil society.

35. In the Syrian Arab Republic, where 50 per cent of health-care centres have reportedly been destroyed or damaged, it is extremely difficult for explosive ordnance victims to obtain access to care. The Mine Action Service supports and coordinates victim assistance among humanitarian mine action actors, including physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, medical support, referrals and self-care through mobile teams.

36. In emergency contexts and in situations in which the United Nations has a long-term mine action presence, establishing and maintaining referral mechanisms is critical to ensure survivors' access to the full range of specialized support available. Referral mechanisms were developed and used by the United Nations in settings such as Darfur, Mali, Yemen and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In Colombia, the United Nations supported the Government in launching a new online system for registering and monitoring assistance to explosive ordnance survivors to improve access to support mechanisms and services offered by various State institutions, such as land restitution, rural family housing subsidies and physical and psychological health services.

37. In the context of the humanitarian cluster system, collaboration was increased under the mine action and child protection areas of responsibility on risk education and victim assistance.¹⁹ The mine action area of responsibility, including civil society, advocated the integration of victim assistance in needs assessments and humanitarian response plans.

38. In Afghanistan, the Mine Action Service provided orthoses, prostheses and fixed and mobile physiotherapy services to more than 6,800 direct victims of conflict, and

¹⁸ UNICEF, monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict.

¹⁹ Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, *Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, Global Protection Cluster 2018 Review* (2019).

disability awareness to more than 5,800. The emergency victim assistance project provided immediate assistance packages to more than 1,000 households in 27 provinces. As a result, 66 per cent of beneficiaries reported availability of food for at least two months.

39. In 2018, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina established a coordination body to assist explosive ordnance victims. In Myanmar, 250 child survivors and other victims of explosive ordnance received appropriate support through UNICEF. Following extensive advocacy, the Government of Myanmar began allocating funding to victim assistance in the fourth quarter of 2017; to date, 500 victims have received support from the Government.

40. In Eritrea, 150,000 people live with a disability, 75,000 of whom are children, explosive ordnance being estimated as the cause of half of the disabilities.²⁰ With the help of community-based rehabilitation workers trained by UNICEF, more than 5,300 children received psychosocial support and physical rehabilitation in the reporting period, including mobility support, such as donkeys, to improve their access to education and social life. As part of its support for Western Sahara, the Mine Action Service assisted more than 250 survivors and family members with income-generating microprojects. Survivors were selected from all five refugee camps in and around Tindouf in Algeria, gender parity being taken into account.

41. In Somalia, the Mine Action Service supported the national authority in carrying out a situation analysis of victim assistance in 2018. The comprehensive report, which contained specific recommendations for establishing effective victim assistance, is informing an action plan currently under development. In the Sudan, the Mine Action Service supported the national authority in developing the national victim assistance strategy for 2017–2019 and provided 200 survivors with rehabilitation and socioeconomic support. In Viet Nam, UNDP is working with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs to develop a new survivor tracking and case management system. Survivors have been engaged in the development of the new system, which will empower them to update their information online and print certificates to access government assistance.

Strategic objective 3: the transfer of mine action functions to national actors is accelerated, with national capacity to fulfil mine action responsibilities increased

42. The United Nations continued to prioritize the transfer of mine action responsibilities and ownership to national authorities. In 2017, the Mine Action Service transferred its programme to rehabilitate ammunition and weapons storage facilities to the Government of Côte d'Ivoire.

43. In other contexts, following the transfer to national authorities, Governments asked to retain United Nations assistance in specific areas. For instance, in Afghanistan, after transferring ownership of the mine action programme to the Government in 2018, the Mine Action Service was asked to continue to provide technical support in areas including advocacy, resource mobilization, funds management and contracting. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, after responsibility was transferred to the national authority, the Mine Action Service was requested to remain to provide capacity enhancement in quality assurance and information management.

44. In Lebanon, UNDP has transferred 3 of the 12 mine action functions to national actors. In Darfur, the Mine Action Service is supporting the transition to the United Nations country team and national authorities as part of the drawdown and reconfiguration of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. In

²⁰ UNICEF, 2018 country office annual report for Eritrea.

addition to formal training, mine action operators are deployed alongside international mentors to increase capacity through on-the-job training, and systematic surveys are being carried out to allow for an accurate handover of data on residual contamination.

45. In other contexts, the United Nations was requested to scale up or adapt its support for national counterparts, in line with shifting conflict dynamics. In Iraq, the Mine Action Service scaled up support for mine action authorities through the provision of technical advisers and liaison officers, and training in mine action management, quality management, risk education and resource mobilization. Nearly 750 local police officers completed training for explosive hazard first responders or on explosive ordnance and improvised explosive device disposal. The Mine Action Service enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of the Libyan Mine Action Centre through support for coordination, accreditation and response planning, and trained national teams to remove and destroy over 200 tons of explosive remnants of war from heavily contaminated ammunition storage areas.

46. In Viet Nam, UNDP established a new project in 2018 to support the Government in addressing the extensive legacy of contamination in the country. This has resulted in a new prioritization system for clearance based on humanitarian and development criteria, and an overall emphasis on achieving progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

47. In Somalia, the Mine Action Service chairs the mine action coordination group jointly with the national authority, and together they review new requests for clearance, prioritization and the tasking of operators. During the reporting period, joint assessment missions were undertaken to five of the federal member states of Somalia. In South Sudan, the Mine Action Service conducted more than 40 joint quality assurance missions as part of its capacity development and mentoring efforts, to prepare for the eventual transition to national ownership.

48. For Colombia to have a mine action capacity supporting its clearance obligations by 2021 under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, the Mine Action Service provided substantial assistance to civilian demining organizations. These included one created by and for former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army as part of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, which has provided employment and reintegration opportunities for over 100 former combatants to date. The Service also strengthened coordination in nine of the most affected regions of the country through a regional coordination project, by ensuring a presence within the regions and liaising with affected communities to better inform decision-making processes at the national level.

49. In Cambodia, South Sudan and Turkey, the United Nations supported the development of national mine action strategies under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and in support of the 2030 Agenda.

50. The elaboration of national mine action standards, consistent with international mine action standards, was also a key area of United Nations support in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan and the Sudan. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the standards relate to the mitigation of threats from improvised explosive devices.

51. In Western Sahara, the Mine Action Service provided technical advice to support the implementation by the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro of its Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Landmines by destroying all known stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines.

Strategic objective 4: mine action is promoted and integrated in multilateral instruments and frameworks as well as national plans and legislation

52. During the period covered by the 2013–2018 Strategy, mine action was increasingly referred to in General Assembly resolutions and reports of the Secretary-General. In the first resolution dedicated to mine action, resolution 2365 (2017), the Security Council addressed a comprehensive approach to mine action. Similarly, mine action is increasingly being integrated into humanitarian planning processes. In 2018, mine action was integrated into 16 humanitarian response plans and was prioritized in Afghanistan, Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In Nigeria, mine action is integrated into the Borno State return strategy for 2018.

53. Mine action was also integrated into many national development frameworks, including the national development plan of Colombia for 2018–2022, the reconstruction and development framework of Iraq, the joint country assessment for 2018 and United Nations strategic framework for 2019–2020 for Libya, and the national development strategy of South Sudan for 2018–2021. The Governments of Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic adopted national sustainable development goals on mine action. In Ukraine, the parliament approved a law on mine action.

54. In Afghanistan, mine action is integrated into the national peace and development framework for 2018–2021 to support progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and is linked to the objectives of three national priority programmes, on urban, agricultural and industrial development. The Mine Action Service assisted the elaboration by the Government of an instrument for the implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which was signed into law and endorsed by presidential decree on 5 September 2018.

55. In the Central African Republic, the support provided by the Mine Action Service in weapons and ammunition management capacity-building is a determining factor for the approval of exemption requests submitted to the sanctions committee to enable the appropriate equipping of the national defence and internal security forces. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Mine Action Service supported the Government in developing the new national action plan for the control and management of small arms and light weapons for 2018–2022.

56. In a number of countries, the United Nations provides support to national mine action authorities in preparing completion plans and extension requests under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. In the reporting period, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, South Sudan, the Sudan, Tajikistan, Yemen and Zimbabwe benefited from such assistance.

57. In Cyprus, the Mine Action Service removed 900,000 m² of suspected hazardous land from the mine action database by analysing hundreds of minefield information files to refine the accuracy of the known threats. In an encouraging development in February 2019, the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities agreed to a confidence-building measure on demining, namely to survey and release 18 suspected hazardous areas, 9 on each side of the buffer zone. Training, technical surveys and assessments by the Mine Action Service around the buffer zone ensured the safety of United Nations peacekeepers and staff of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, which is mandated to recover, identify and return the remains of persons who went missing during the events of 1963/64 and 1974. This helps to build confidence between the communities in support of a settlement agreement in Cyprus.

58. In Myanmar, the working group on mine risks is chaired jointly by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and UNICEF and includes 10 ministries

and 41 international and national organizations. The group fosters common risk reduction strategies and delivery of the inter-agency and interministerial workplan. There are four state-level working groups on mine risks functioning in Kachin, Kayah, Kayin and Shan.

59. In the Syrian Arab Republic, with UNICEF support, the Ministry of Education incorporated explosive ordnance risk education into the national school curriculum. Risk education is also mainstreamed into the polio immunization campaign in all 14 governorates, with a focus on areas reported as contaminated with explosive ordnance.

60. In Turkey, UNDP released 4 km² of land and destroyed 34,000 anti-personnel mines as part of the country's efforts to establish open and secure borders by developing and strengthening its legal, institutional and technical capacity in line with the European Union integrated border management policy.

61. In Yemen, UNDP is acting as a coordinator between the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement and the Yemen Executive Mine Action Centre, which is supporting the agreement through mine action. In addition, UNDP is providing direct assistance to the national mine action authority in the form of supplies and equipment.

Internal commitments

62. In addition to the objectives of the Strategy, the United Nations is committed to strengthening its capacity. In the reporting period, there were significant achievements on the following three commitments: strengthening implementation of the United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes; promoting compliance with the International Mine Action Standards and International Ammunition Technical Guidelines; and strengthening the substantive skills of United Nations staff.

63. In November 2018, the first mixed-gender demining team to operate in Afghanistan cleared one of the last remaining minefields in Bamyan Province. In Cambodia, the national authority developed and launched the strategy on gender mainstreaming in mine action for 2018–2022, on the basis of the United Nations Gender Guidelines and with technical and financial assistance from UNDP.

64. In Iraq, the Mine Action Service deployed a gender expert to develop a gender mainstreaming plan and toolkit on gender and diversity. One early deliverable of this was the inclusion of female police officers in an explosive ordnance first responder training programme. As part of the programme in Iraq, the United Nations Gender Guidelines were also translated into Arabic, and a partnership was established with the gender unit within the national mine action authority. In Somalia, the Mine Action Service developed a plan to mainstream gender into procurement, project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

65. The International Mine Action Standards Review Board, chaired by the Mine Action Service, drafted standards on risk management, building clearance and the disposal of improvised explosive devices, which complement the United Nations improvised explosive device disposal standards, published in May 2018. Six other guidelines were updated, and a new standard on victim assistance is currently under consideration. Furthermore, the Office for Disarmament Affairs recently published three implementation support guides on the International Ammunition Technical Guidelines.

66. On the basis of my Agenda for Disarmament, the Mine Action Service developed a road map on smart improvised explosive device threat mitigation technology to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to mitigate the threat posed by improvised explosive devices. The initiative is aimed at coordinating

international efforts and strengthening information-sharing by bringing together United Nations entities and international partners to collaboratively assess threats, identify suitable technologies and connect with ongoing threat mitigation initiatives.

67. Furthermore, the Mine Action Service mapped the impact of improvised explosive devices on the United Nations and the Organization's ability to respond to the threat. Interviews with staff of nearly 40 United Nations entities indicate that the areas of work most affected relate to operational effectiveness, security assessments, humanitarian and protection responses, staff safety and security, strategic planning and programming, and policy development. All interviewees agreed that an effective response required improved information-sharing, partnerships, standardized data collection and a preventative approach. I note with appreciation the work of the Mine Action Service on such sensitive and complex matters. I strongly encourage States in a position to do so to contribute financially and otherwise to building an improvised explosive device threat mitigation capacity adapted to the needs of the United Nations. Enabling the Mine Action Service to pursue innovative approaches, strengthen inter-agency coordination through information-sharing, equip the Organization with training and tools and, in doing so, create a coherent whole-of-system approach is essential for the United Nations to operate safely and effectively in current conflict environments.

68. In the area of strengthening the substantive skills of United Nations staff, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) trained 310 mine action personnel in human resources and procurement, as well as portfolio, programme and project management. UNICEF trained 81 professionals, two thirds of whom were United Nations staff, to adopt a public health approach, strengthen risk education programming and develop more collaborative results frameworks that integrate all the components of mine action.

Introduction of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023

69. In 2018, the Mine Action Service coordinated and led the drafting of the Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023.²¹ Following six months of extensive consultations involving over 300 stakeholders, the Strategy was endorsed on 4 December 2018 by the principals of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

70. The Strategy provides a comprehensive whole-of-system approach to mine action, drawing on global frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda and introducing cross-cutting objectives on gender and age diversity, as well as mainstreaming mine action into broader priorities, including humanitarian assistance, human rights and sustaining peace. The Strategy will guide the work of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action and constitutes a framework for accountability, both collective and individual, for contributing entities. It also introduces a theory of change and a reinforced monitoring and evaluation mechanism, the results of which will be conveyed in my reports to the General Assembly.

Strategic outcome 1: protection of individuals and communities from the risks and socioeconomic impacts of explosive ordnance is strengthened

71. Mine action strengthens the protection of civilians and enables socioeconomic growth in a variety of ways, including by releasing contaminated land and delivering risk awareness information to humanitarian workers and at-risk communities.

²¹ Available at https://mineaction.org/sites/default/files/documents/un_mine_action_strategy_2019-2023_-_final_for_online_0.pdf.

72. As the number of forcibly displaced persons continues to rise, the United Nations has adapted its responses to seek to effectively provide displaced populations with protection from explosive ordnance. In Libya, the Mine Action Service trained a gender-balanced team of internally displaced persons to deliver risk education in camps. In South Sudan, more than 30 schools, 39 health clinics and 185 water points were verified as safe from explosive ordnance, enabling safe and voluntary returns and the resumption of livelihoods for internally displaced persons. In Lebanon, UNDP and the national authority organized a regional workshop on risk education for Syrian refugees in April 2019.

73. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, mine action operations restored access to agricultural land for community members in line with Sustainable Development Goal 1, and 4,700 individuals now have safe access to water in line with Goal 6. In Iraq, in support of Goal 11, the clearance of the Hawijah power line will restore electricity to 100,000 people. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the explosive ordnance risk assessment process undertaken by the Mine Action Service enabled infrastructure projects valued at \$22 million to proceed safely and without delay.

74. Following initial assessments, and in coordination with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and government authorities in the country, the Mine Action Service safely relocated a large quantity of unsecured explosives, which had posed a danger to civilians in Bouar and Bangui, in June 2019.

75. In response to the increased need for risk education, UNICEF and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining formed the Explosive Ordnance Risk Education Advisory Group in April 2019. The Advisory Group will provide guidance to the mine action sector and beyond, and identify ways to improve the integration, effectiveness and efficiency of risk education.

Strategic outcome 2: survivors, family members and communities affected by explosive ordnance have equal access to health and education and participate fully in social and economic life

76. I deeply regret that, despite my calls, victim assistance continues to be the most underfunded pillar of humanitarian mine action. In a step towards addressing this, on the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action in 2019, I launched Safe Ground, a United Nations-led global advocacy and fundraising campaign. Its aim is to turn minefields into playing fields, raise international awareness about victims and survivors of explosive ordnance and mobilize resources for victim assistance programmes and projects.

77. At the country level, the United Nations supported initiatives to improve data gathering and analysis on victims and their needs. This included a situation and stakeholder analysis in Libya to inform a national victim assistance plan, and an assessment of support for persons with disabilities in two provinces of Viet Nam, where UNDP is using a new survivor tracking and case management system. In Ukraine, UNDP has begun work on mapping victim assistance, although this is challenged by a lack of funding, access and reliable data.

78. The inclusion of explosive ordnance victims in national disability strategies and case management systems is vital to strengthen the long-term, comprehensive support required by survivors. This has been achieved in the national disability strategic plan of Cambodia for 2019–2023 with UNDP support. In Myanmar, UNICEF began integrating victim assistance support into the national child protection case management system. In Afghanistan, the Mine Action Service, together with the Government, is developing an online system to manage and improve the delivery of assistance to persons with disabilities, including victims of explosive ordnance.

Strategic outcome 3: national institutions effectively lead and manage mine action functions and responsibilities

79. United Nations support for national ownership and capacity in mine action varies widely across countries, depending on the maturity, capacity and needs of the national authorities. In Afghanistan, the national authority has been effectively leading and managing its mine action programme since 2018. At its request, the Mine Action Service is focused on emerging challenges related to the evolving character of explosive ordnance threats. The Mine Action Service is currently assisting the national mine action authority in developing a standard operating procedure to prioritize mine action interventions in areas under government control and also where the conflict is ongoing, in full respect of humanitarian principles. In Iraq, where the recent conflict with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) has created extensive new contamination, hindering humanitarian access and stabilization, the Mine Action Service provides strategic and technical advice to the national authorities, focused on tasking and reporting mechanisms. In Yemen, UNDP is working with mine action authorities to develop a mine action coordination centre, and UNICEF is helping the national authority to develop standard operating procedures for coordinating mine risk education. In Tajikistan, UNDP is supporting the implementation of a new information management system to improve analysis of the impact of hazards, set transparent priorities and measure operational efficiency.

80. A number of countries are taking significant steps to bolster their support for mine action. Early in 2019, the Government of Myanmar initiated a discussion on creating a national mine action authority and participated in the International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers, held at the United Nations Office at Geneva. In Viet Nam, the decree on the management and implementation of mine action came into force on 20 March 2019. As part of the efforts to support its implementation, UNDP facilitated a self-assessment of the national mine action centre and is currently developing a strategy to fulfil the commitments of the decree, including strengthening coordination between the national and regional information management systems.

Cross-cutting strategic outcome 1: momentum and profile of mine action efforts, including through mainstreaming into humanitarian assistance, human rights, peacebuilding, stabilization and sustainable development, are maintained and enhanced

81. Mine action lies at the core of the peace and security, humanitarian and development nexus, necessitating an integrated and comprehensive whole-of-system approach.

82. The humanitarian programme cycle was revised in 2019 to foster multisectoral analysis and prioritize response for people most in need. Mine action will now be better integrated into analysis, planning and monitoring under the humanitarian needs overviews and humanitarian response plans. Various aspects, such as explosive ordnance contamination and mine risk awareness, are specifically highlighted for consideration at all stages, and mine action survivors are specifically referred to in vulnerability analyses.

83. At the regional level, in line with the memorandum of understanding of June 2017, the Mine Action Service provided technical advice to a working group led by the African Union on developing an Africa-wide strategy for preventing and countering improvised explosive devices. It also contributed to developing an African Union policy on the management of recovered weapons in peace support operations.

84. In Afghanistan, the protection cluster assisted the United Nations leadership in its discussions with parties to the conflict, including on the humanitarian imperative of mine action. In Myanmar, the Government established, by presidential order, an interministerial committee for preventing grave violations against children in armed conflict. Mine action actors will engage with the country task force to support the action plan currently under development. In Somalia, the Mine Action Service supports the United Nations Transition Plan for Somalia through the clearance of public infrastructure, such as the University of Mogadishu and the national stadium.

Cross-cutting strategic outcome 2: mine action programmes address the specific needs of women, girls, men and boys from diverse groups, while facilitating their empowerment and inclusion

85. In 2019, the UNOPS Peace and Security Cluster launched its gender and diversity strategy for 2019–2023 to ensure that Mine Action Service mandates are operationalized in line with the system-wide strategy on gender parity, system-wide targets and Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10. In Iraq, gender-responsive provisions were incorporated into procurement processes, and standard practices on gender mainstreaming were developed for national partners. In Sinjar, Iraq, mixed-gender teams bring together individuals of different religions and ethnicities, supporting both the empowerment of women and the building of bonds among groups that can sustain peace. In Yemen, in line with Goal 4, more than 17,000 deaf children were reached with specifically tailored risk awareness supported by UNICEF.

IV. Observations and recommendations

86. Conflicts are increasingly intense and protracted, while their urbanization presents acute challenges to the protection of civilians, including the devastating long-term impact of explosive ordnance. Deliberate or otherwise indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects, including critical infrastructure such as health-care facilities, raise serious concerns about the extent to which parties to conflict are complying with their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. The unprecedented number of refugees and internally displaced persons is a human catastrophe of outstanding proportions, their plight aggravated by the threat of explosive ordnance. I would again remind parties to conflict and Member States of their obligations to respect, and ensure respect for, international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as international refugee law. I would urge those States not yet parties to all mine action-related instruments to join them and ensure their implementation so as to contribute towards greater humanity, peace and stability and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. I also call for clear provisions in all ceasefire and peace agreements for sharing information so that explosive ordnance can be quickly identified, marked and removed.

87. I am pleased to note the professional approaches to prioritizing mine action interventions developed in partnership with the United Nations, such as those in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam, which have successfully reduced casualty rates and led to the development of strategies to fulfil State commitments under international humanitarian law. With preparations for the Fourth Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention under way, I pledge the backing of the United Nations to develop a concrete action plan to support universalization of the Convention and ensure that all States parties fulfil their commitments.

88. The whole-of-system approach to mine action is embodied in the new Strategy of the United Nations on Mine Action 2019–2023. Its objectives and outcomes reflect key global priorities, including gender, youth and diversity, which are also integrated

into the humanitarian response framework and supportive of the 2030 Agenda. It provides a strong accountability framework based on a theory of change, which drives United Nations coherence and its commitment to effective action. I call upon Member States to provide consistent and long-term funding for the implementation of the Strategy at the national, regional and global levels.

89. The United Nations approach to mine action is all-encompassing. It relies on constant interaction between field requirements, planning and programming; institutional mandates; policies and guidance; and humanitarian and human rights bodies. This multichannel interaction is supported by the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action and by regular dialogue with civil society. The revitalization of the mine action area of responsibility, under the leadership of the Mine Action Service and chaired jointly with a civil society organization to foster greater partnership, has led to the establishment of a network of mine action protection coordinators at the field level and has helped to deepen the integration of mine action into humanitarian response. I strongly encourage Member States to consider mine action at the earliest stages of their planning and budgeting of humanitarian, peacebuilding and development interventions.

90. I am deeply concerned by the continued underfunding of assistance for survivors of explosive ordnance. The future of affected countries depends greatly on the ability of States to provide the right level of care, both physical and psychosocial, and to ensure the reintegration of their affected populations, with dignity, in all aspects of society. The provision of such assistance is a legal obligation for some States. I urge all Member States, affected and contributors alike, to include the issue in their national and international agendas and to take appropriate measures to correct the current underfunding. I also encourage all States and relevant actors to support the Safe Ground global campaign, which is aimed at supporting affected populations and raising funds for victims of explosive ordnance.

91. In my Agenda for Disarmament, I called upon United Nations entities, under the leadership of the Mine Action Service, to promote a strengthened whole-of-system response to the improvised explosive device threat. I therefore welcome the finalization of the United Nations improvised explosive device disposal standards and the development of the road map on smart improvised explosive device threat mitigation technology. This tool is innovative, built on partnerships, forward-looking and represents a promising step towards making the United Nations better prepared for such threats. I commend the work of the Mine Action Service and other relevant United Nations entities on improvised explosive devices and encourage all in a position to do so to provide the human, technological and financial resources to enhance the whole-of-system approach to addressing the threat.

92. The achievements described in the present report would not have been possible without the thousands of national and international United Nations staff, whether they advocate mine action at Headquarters or implement programmes in the field. These women and men work in some of the most difficult conditions to protect affected populations, humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel, including peacekeepers, from the deadly threat of explosive ordnance.