

Report

Mine Action Regional Dialogue Event

11 July 2018

Conference Hall, Hotel Reikarz
Mariupol, Donetsk oblast

BACKGROUND

For almost two years, the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine (PCU) has been organizing regional round tables in the east of Ukraine bringing together main national and international mine action stakeholders in Ukraine – Ministry of Defence (MoD), State Emergency Service (SESU), State Special Transport Service (STS), Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons (MinTOT), Halo Trust, Danish Demining Group (DDG), and Swiss Demining Fund (FSD) – and representatives of local authorities. The aim of these meetings is to present to the local stakeholders to scope of humanitarian mine action activities, including demining plans and capacities, as well as mine risk education (MRE). Round tables give opportunity to representatives of local authorities to highlight their needs and openly discuss problems directly with the state mine action officials and international operators. It is also an opportunity for domestic and international NGOs to present their activities in MRE, mine victim assistance (MVA) and other aspects of humanitarian and legal support to mine-affected communities. Between March 2017 and June 2018, the PCU organized five round tables – in Severodonetsk, Kramatorsk, Pokrovsk, and twice in Mariupol.

SUMMARY

The objective of the Mariupol Mine Action regional dialogue event was to acquaint representatives of the public authorities, local self-government agencies, NGOs, educational establishments, and police of Mariupol and of the Donetsk oblast with the main mine action actors in Ukraine. By organizing this dialogue event the PCU provided them with the opportunity to openly present their needs and discuss problems that appear due to mine contamination, directly with the state officials authorized to perform mine action activities.

The Mariupol event evidenced great interest for this topic among representatives of local government, oblast administration and its departments responsible for civil protection, environmental issues, economy, development, education, social protection, culture, and tourism, as well as among representatives of mine-affected communities and local NGOs.

Despite a general perception that mine action is predominantly male job, the gender representation at the round table showed that there is equal concern about mine problem among both men (58%) and women (42%). The importance of the topic was also shown through presence of journalists from local radio and TV stations, newspapers and magazines.

The event was organized in form of dialog, with participants working in three groups with specific, tailored topics for the region. This format gave representatives of local communities and

NGOs an opportunity to express their problems and concerns regarding safety, socio-economic development, ecology and basic living standards affected by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), and conflict in general.

The work in the format of a brain-storm session was arranged in three groups, with following composition:

Group 1 “Humanitarian issues” – local representatives of education and social protection, culture and tourism sector, mass-media, local activists;

Group 2 “Land and territories” – representatives of the cadastre department, agro-industry and agricultural land development agencies, local authorities, village mayors, local government officials;

Group 3 “Security” – representatives of National Police, Civil Protection Agency, Departments of Ecology and Natural Resources.

Participants discussed in their groups following questions:

- How do we perceive the current situation with mine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) hazard elimination?
- What is important for us in resolving the current problems?
- What ideal results achieved in mine and ERW hazard elimination are we (the expert group participating in the processes) willing to see in a year?
- What practical actions and projects would enable us to resolve the identified problems and draw us nearer to the anticipated results?

The results of the discussion in working groups were summarized in group presentations, followed by panel discussion with expert panellists: Lt. Col. Yevgeniy Zubarevskiy (MoD), Col. Oleh Bondar (SESU), Miljenko Vahtarić (PCU), and Dmytro Panshyn (MinTOT).

WORKING GROUPS DISCUSSION

Group 1 “Humanitarian issues”

In the Group’s opinion the following needs were identified:

- to increase capacities and activities to identify and define suspected hazardous areas (SHA);
- to improve co-ordination between the responsible demining agencies, public authorities and local governments, including co-ordination and interaction between the agricultural sector and military structures.
- to improve marking of SHA with warning signs;
- to enable availability of information about the SHA;
- to describe procedure and define institutions to which to apply for information about SHA;
- to solve problem of access to the “grey zone” settlements (e.g., Staromaryivka village);
- to make amendments in legislation that would enable land owners (farmers) who rent land defined as SHA to receive compensations and tax benefits.

Group 2 “Land and territories”

The group specified the following needs:

- to develop normative framework for operative co-ordination between the agencies responsible for demining and public authorities/local governments and improve co-ordination and information sharing between military, SESU, local governments and public authorities acting in the rayons;
- to develop accurate maps of SHA and to update them regularly in accordance with reports of new contamination caused by combat operations and shelling that can contaminate already cleared territories;
- to develop and organize mine risk education (MRE) for the different social groups in the vicinity of SHA, as regards the possible access to the local recreational zones, cemeteries, forests;
- to set up priorities for humanitarian demining, to have relevant and accurate information on communities needs and forward them to responsible government agencies;
- to explore new possibilities and technologies to deliver information to mine affected communities and raise mine awareness;
- to develop timely medical support for mine victims, providing trainings in primary medical support;
- to assure comprehensive social-economic support to the population living in mine-affected communities;
- in general, conclusion of this group was that there should be established a clear work co-ordination between MoD, SESU, public authorities and local governments in order to resolve all the mentioned issues in a comprehensive manner.

During the Group 2 work the mayors of village councils focused the discussion on the following specific problems in their villages:

Village Hranitne:

- need for demining of places for mass gathering;
- agricultural land had partially been cleared, but there is no chance to measure land plots (co-ordinates) due to continued combat operations;
- absence of accurate information regarding the mined areas.

Village Talakivka:

- need to continue with demining;
- insufficient marking of the SHA;
- insufficient level of information sharing between the local government and SESU.

Group 3 “Security”

The group specified the following needs:

- to provide MRE and primary medical support training for the local communities;
- to improve marking of SHA;

- to enhance co-ordination between government organizations responsible for mine action and local authorities to be able to focus mine action activities on the local community's needs;
- to divide activities of demining organizations and international operators on territorial basis and ensure systemic demining;
- to determine a co-ordination authority;
- to define standards and assure quality of demining works;
- to define clear line of responsibilities for every step of the process of humanitarian demining;
- to make risk analysis of every mine affected community.

PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel discussion was held in questions-and-answers format with the participation of representatives from public local government, MoD, SESU, MinTOT, PCU, GICHD, HALO Trust, DDG, FSD, ICRC, UNDP, and local NGOs. Based on the discussion results obtained in three groups, the identified needs were summarized as three discussion topics for the panel discussion:

1. "Mine Risk Education" - extend and strengthen MRE campaign for both children and adults;
2. "Co-ordination" - adjust and improve process of information exchange between mine action actors, local mine-affected communities, demining, and security agencies;
3. "Quality control of demining operations" - develop standards for quality control of humanitarian demining operations and marking of SHA.

1. Mine Risk Education

Lt. Col. Yevgeniy Zubarevskiy (MoD) informed about the Armed Forces' activities. The main target audience for their MRE are children as the most vulnerable group and a group that is easiest to organize and pass the educational messages.

According to military and SESU officials, as of now there is a need to strengthen work with the adult population, in particular, those involved in agriculture (farmers and their hired workers), forestry, industrial production (e.g., miners), and infrastructure maintenance works. MRE is expedient to be performed by local government executives, civil-military administration officials, and young citizens resident in the contaminated territories. Possible formats of MRE may include lectures in schools, cinemas, theatres; "live" communication; information bulletins; posters in public places, in village councils' premises, in state agencies; USB flash drives with educational messages; TV broadcasting and social networks.

During the discussion, some problems regarding the public mine awareness-raising campaigns were revealed. In some settlements MRE campaigns had been conducted in parallel by state institutions and NGOs (including international NGOs). MRE programmes were performed rather regularly in some settlements, while other settlements had none. Dmytro Panshyn (MinTOT) pointed out, a co-ordination group was created to resolve that issue; the group included representatives of MinTOT, MoD, SESU, public authorities and local governments. This mechanism was established in the framework of the "Communities Capacity Building" Project in the villages of Zolote, Popasna, and Hirske and it was used to co-ordinate educational

programmes performed or launched by NGOs, to standardize educational programmes and events, and to distribute evenly the events by the territories and target groups.

2. Co-ordination

According to MoD representative Lt. Col. Yevgeniy Zubarevskiy, the procedure of working with explosive ordnance in the mine contaminated areas had been determined by the United Forces Headquarters and brought to the notice of the Civil-Military Administrations. There is a gap in sharing information between the executive authorities and the public-at-large (e.g., the information from the rayon Civil-Military Administration to the village mayors had failed to reach; or not all the village mayors had taken the information to their notice and shared it with local residents).

Col. Oleg Bondar (SESU) proposed to communities to be more proactive and provide more information and requests to SESU for feedback regarding any problematic issues.

Miljenko Vahtarić (PCU) proposed to appoint regional mine action co-ordinators who are employees of local administration in agriculture, development or any other department that is the most affected by mine problem. They would be focal points for all mine action related activities and would be connection between state and local authorities. They would collect information, requests, and problems from mine-affected communities and deliver them to relevant state authorities. At the same time, they would also receive updated information on current and planned activities in oblast and distribute it to mayors, village councils and local NGOs.

One of detected problematic issues is absence of central mine victim database. Data is collected by different agencies (MinTot, MoD, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Policy, SESU, international organizations) from different sources. Current legislation lacks the definition of the term “mine victim” and, correspondingly, those victims fall within the category “ATO victims”. The state standards have not been developed to render support to the victims. The “Law on Mine Action”, which should define the term “mine victim”, had not yet been adopted by Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament). The importance of collecting data about the victims is stipulated by the tactical and strategic needs. Firstly, the data is required to prioritize tasks, ensure operative response in providing support to the victims. Secondly, the data would enable planning and distributing resources of relevant national governmental and non-governmental agencies and international organizations.

3. Quality Control of Demining Operations

Lt. Col. Yevgeniy Zubarevskiy (MoD) stated that Ukrainian Armed Forces are responsible for the quality control of demining operations. Upon completion of demining operations, the remaining SHA shall be marked in accordance with national mine action standards (NMAS). In connection with marking, two problems were detected:

- 1) On some territories, which are in close proximity to combat operations zone, even cleared areas are under the threat of new mine and ERW contamination;
- 2) Some irresponsible locals remove warning signs that mark SHA.

To resolve the second problem, it is necessary to conduct mine risk education with the emphasis on the importance of marking, appoint responsible officials to manage the marking signs (for

them to be visible, not covered with vegetation, cleared from dirt, snow, etc.). Some ideas of development of software and usage of modern telecommunication technology (smartphones) could be used for prevention of mine incidents and accidental entrance into SHA.

Miljenko Vahtarić (PCU) proposed better co-ordination between SESU, MoD, police and road management service regarding maintenance of warning signs once they are placed on the borders of SHA. Local representatives should be informed about their position and take responsibility to maintain them, keep them visible and inform authorities if they are missing from their place. It is also recommended to the media to launch educational campaign for mine affected communities not to remove the warning signs, with a key message that their purpose is to protect lives and prevent people from entering SHAs.

During panel discussion, participants reiterated some problematic issues mentioned during group work. Firstly, the issue of compensation for losses to farmers and village communities because of impossibility to use land polluted with mines and ERW, vicinity of contact line and uncertainty when the conflict will end. Secondly, the issue of an acute need in adopting a “Law on Mine Action” (in development procedure of Verkhovna Rada’s working group headed by member of parliament Mr. A. Teteruk), which may regulate the compensations and victim support.

As a community leader, Ms. Pugachiova (Head of NGO Berehynia), pointed out that NGOs are ready to move their proposals to improve the draft “Law on Mine Action” and to help in its advocacy.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion during the Mariupol regional dialogue event highlighted a number of problems relevant to the PCU project “Building Ukrainian Humanitarian Demining Capacity”, including:

- **Co-ordination** – the discussion clearly showed a lack of co-ordination between state authorities responsible for mine action and local community. Despite MoD’s and SESU’s local presence, the communication between them and local civil administrations is either absent or very sporadic. The communication usually goes in the direction of their headquarters, without sharing information or collecting priorities from local mine-affected communities. Lack of co-ordination is also quite obvious in MRE programmes – some local communities had several MRE programmes, while others had none.
- **Determination of SHA and marking** – representatives of local administration – and especially local mine-affected communities – expressed their concern about the lack of information on exact mined locations. SHAs are poorly marked with warning signs or not marked at all. Some territories are marked with improvised warning signs that were obviously placed by non-professionals and their accuracy and importance is questionable. Such improvised markers are often leading to more confusion rather than protect local population. Some of placed warning signs did not meet international or Ukrainian standards. It is very common that some irresponsible citizens would remove or steal warning signs to use them for their personal purposes. A good educational campaign could help to educate local population on the importance of warning signs and possible detrimental consequences of tampering with the markers.

- **Availability of information and data centralization** – nonexistence of central state authority responsible for managing and co-ordinating mine action activities (National Mine Action Centre – NMAC) is leading to the lack of information or a flood of contradictory data about the size and position of SHAs, numbers of mine victims, needs for humanitarian demining, marking, MRE, etc. The dialogue event in Mariupol confirmed insufficient exchange of information between state organizations responsible for mine action; their use of separate databases is not productive but rather confusing. Representatives of local mine-affected communities reported that they would like to know where they can find reliable information on mine problem to inform their citizens in order to prevent new civilian casualties.
- **Priority settings** – this problem is connected with previous. Without clear, reliable and centralized information it is impossible to set mine action priorities. Dialogue participants mentioned that humanitarian demining in Ukraine is not systematic, which – combined with lack of MRE co-ordination – prevents an efficient use of scarce capacities and does not allow to direct activities to the most affected communities.
- **Certification and liability** – the aim of humanitarian demining is to return the cleared lands to their owners to safe use. Issuing clearance certificates implies responsibility and liability for performed demining work and eventual consequences for poor quality or negligence in demining process that can result in human casualties, damage or destruction of property. Process of development of NMA, including standards for quality control and certification of cleared land, is expected to be finished by the end of the October this year. Till then no valid certificates will be available for the users of cleared land.
- **Legislation** – all afore-mentioned problems are result of absence of “Law on Mine Action” that should define mine action structure in Ukraine with responsible institutions, controlling mechanisms and liabilities. The law should establish a national mine action centre – an operational and co-ordinating body with clear tasks that will be recognized by mine-affected communities as the focal point for humanitarian demining and other pillars of mine action in Ukraine. The importance and need of development and adoption of mine action legislation was repeated by almost every participant of the roundtable.

Moderators: Olena Kopina, Oleksandr Mitkov.

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