

**Opening Remarks of
Mr. Alexander Zouev, Assistant Secretary-General, Rule of Law and Security
Institutions, Department of Peacekeeping Operations
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**Excellences,
Chers amis,
Mesdames et messieurs**

Introduction

C'est un honneur et aussi un grand plaisir pour moi d'être parmi vous. J'accorde, personnellement, la plus grande attention à cette semaine importante entièrement consacrée à la lutte contre les engins explosifs de tous ordres ; des engins qui continuent à tuer et à blesser tant de civils et à bloquer le retour à la vie normale pendant des décennies après que les conflits soient terminés et après que les armes se soient tues.

Merci Michael de nous accueillir au Palais des Nations. Cette salle est magnifique ; elle est bien remplie et, grâce à UNMAS, et malgré ses ressources très limitées, nous bénéficions du soutien d'un nombre d'interprètes.

Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Chair of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action, is known to give a high-level of importance to this issue, in particular to the increasingly crucial role that the UN system plays in assistance in mine action. Despite his intention to be here today, the pressure of the UN agenda prevented him from joining us.

It is my pleasure to represent him today.

Although recently appointed to the role of Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions, I am no stranger to humanitarian mine action.

From 2011 to 2016, I was the United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Tajikistan. During my time there, I saw how effective partnerships between the National Mine Action Centre, the United Nations and civil society can produce tangible and powerful results.

I have also spent many years serving in UNICEF and UNOPS and so have strong connections with the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action.

[Mine Action: Advancing Protection, Peace and Development]

This week's theme is most important and most timely. As you know, Secretary-General Guterres is currently spearheading a huge reform of the way that the UN is doing business in significant areas of work. For months now, we have been involved on reflecting of a better integration of many activities to achieve greater efficiency and greater impact. And, greater impact in the business of the UN is, first and foremost, about reducing casualties and fatalities and paving the way for affected countries to recover from natural and man-made disasters and be equipped to manage their own future.

This is precisely what all of you, all of us, do in mine action. This year's theme highlights the critical role of mine action in humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Member States have repeatedly affirmed the importance of mine action in recent General Assembly resolutions, in particular its resolution on "assistance in mine action", resolution A/72/75.

Last June, at Bolivia's initiative, the Security Council also recognized it in adopting the first ever comprehensive resolution on mine action (SCRes 2365 (2017)). Indeed, the Council resolution underscores the criticality of mine action in humanitarian responses, peacebuilding and stabilisation efforts as well as peace operations. It also stresses the importance of cooperation and coordination in mine action, a role that, I am proud to say, UNMAS carries out in the most effective manner.

I also want to share with you that, last October, as the United Nations Foundation celebrated its 20 years since its creation by, then, CNN Ted Turner, it honoured UNMAS and its Director with the prestigious Global Leadership Award, an honour which had never been given to a UN Secretariat entity.

These resolutions and recognition of global leadership are important demonstrations of a worldwide community's awareness that progress is being made. Most importantly, it gives us, the practitioners and leaders, solid ground to strengthen our advocacy: the work is not over and that more needs to be done to serve affected communities.

[Humanitarian emergency responses]

In **Iraq**, the explosive hazards threat is complex, extensive, and exceeds the capacity of any individual country to address it. The Government of Iraq together with the UN, and with the assistance of international stakeholders have prioritized risk education, victim assistance and, of course, clearance as essential ‘first steps’ required by affected and displaced populations, and a pre-requisite for any rehabilitation or reconstruction work to be carried out.

[Protection]

In **Mali**, we have recorded that the number and complexity of IED attacks have increased; and yet, the number of peacekeepers victim is decreasing, thanks to the action of mine action experts mentoring, training and equipping peacekeepers.

[Peace]

In **Colombia**, the restitution of land through mine action is a key component of efforts to stimulate post-conflict rural development and build conditions for a sustainable peace.

[Development]

In **Afghanistan**, a recent Post-Demining Impact Assessment on a sample of cleared land indicated that agricultural production could contribute one million dollars to the economies of the affected communities in one year alone.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not need to convince any of you of the criticality of your work; neither does the Secretary-General of the United Nations who stated last year that “*Mine action is critical to peace and security, humanitarian response and development efforts.*”

As conflicts endure and intensify, the demand for mine action increases.

“Mine action: People centred; Needs driven”

I wish you success in discussing how to improve further the way we all do business in mine action.

Merci