

**Statement by Ambassador Stefano Toscano, GICHD Director**  
**Mine Action Support Group Meeting**  
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## **Middle East Fact Finding Mission**

The GICHD was in the Middle East region in June/July 2016 to get a better grasp of the situation. The missions focused on cross-border support activities into Syria from neighboring countries and evolving activities in Central and Northern Iraq.

A number of challenges for mine action were identified in both Syria and Iraq:

- The need to standardize information management, operational approaches such as NTS and training support - particularly in cross-border activities involving Syrian partners;
- The need to provide capacity development for the national and local authorities in Iraq;
- The need to address shortfalls in current mine action standards concerning IED threat in both Syria and Iraq;
- The need for innovative solutions to mine action in conflict settings, with particular focus on mobile technologies and remote training capabilities to support NTS and data collection in areas where it is difficult for established operators to intervene.

The GICHD has started to deliver activities to address these challenges with partners including national and local authorities, UNMAS, and NGOs. For example, last month, we conducted a workshop in Gaziantep on information management bringing together mine action partners working in Syria. This workshop aimed at agreeing on common data flows and data formats which is key to plan and manage operations.

## **Deployment of SMART dogs**

The planned deployment of Mine Detection Dogs equipped with the latest technology –the so-called SMART dogs’ system – represents another example of our work in the region and of how innovative solutions can support mine action efforts there.

Until now, the use of dogs in technical survey operations was a rather laborious task, requiring extensive ground preparation and a dog handler who would keep the dog on a leash. The SMART system now allows a dog to search for evidence of explosives without a

leash. Every movement of the dog is monitored and evidence points recorded through GPS. The dog handler can interact with the dog through a microphone and camera from a distance up to 100m. A map view gives the real-time location of the dog's activities.

In partnership with operators, the SMART system will be deployed by end of this year in Cambodia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Colombia. Dogs will also be deployed in Northern Iraq, by November, to identify areas containing IEDs, in combination with manual and mechanical assets, as this is a safe and cost effective way of reducing the IED threat for returning IDPs and refugees.

### **Addressing IED threat**

Regarding IEDs, the GICHD is currently conducting an assessment of how mine action actors are addressing that challenging issue. As we all know, the operating environment in which IED Disposal (IEDD) takes place is complex and fast-evolving: a constant change in IED design and tactics, contexts ranging from the relatively safe to the highly insecure, and operators often working under pressing humanitarian needs. This has an impact on staff, equipment, and processes. Still, key managerial and operational dimensions characterizing mine action (such as information management, survey and clearance, and quality management) should be applied to IEDD operations as well, possibly even more strictly, given the particularly unforgiving nature of the environment in which they are conducted.

Preliminary findings of the assessment also point to the need for guidance on

- 1) the selection of personnel offering existing IEDD experience and qualifications, and
- 2) on the development of competency requirements for different levels of IEDD (similarly to what exists for EOD in MA)

Many aspects of existing IMAS are applicable to IEDD. A new IMAS for IEDD could highlight applicable aspects of existing IMAS and address relevant aspects unique to IEDD, whereas technical notes for mine action and SOPs should address the technical detail of carrying out IEDD. These questions will be discussed during an IMAS meeting later this month.

You will find the information on both the SMART dogs and the IEDs study in the written update provided by the GICHD.