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On behalf of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), I wish to thank the Government of South Africa and the African Union for hosting this meeting and to the organizers for inviting UNICEF to talk about Mine Risk Education (MRE).

UNICEF has been involved in mine action since the early 1990s and has been supporting mine action projects and activities in over 30 countries including 12 countries from Africa. The overall goal for UNICEF is to reduce the number of injuries and deaths related to landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) and contribute to a protective environment for children, their families and communities. UNICEF works with and supports states, civil-society organizations and other national and international organizations to help children, their families and communities understand how to reduce the risks of mines and explosive remnants of war especially through risk education and promotion of safe behavior.

As part of the discussion in this panel, allow me to share with you some observations and lessons learned in mine risk education that are based experience in Africa as well as other countries at the global level. I will start by a brief overview of MRE.

Under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty (APMBT) mine-affected states have an obligation to take measures that will protect civilian populations from the threat of mines and to reduce accidents and casualties. At the First Review Conference of the APMBT, States Parties committed themselves to the following in the Nairobi Action Plan (2004 – 2009):

Action #21: Ensure that mine risk education programmes are made available in all communities at risk to prevent mine incidents and save lives, promote mutual understanding and reconciliation, and improve mine action planning, integrating such programmes into education systems and broader relief and development activities, taking into consideration age, gender, social, economic, political and geographical factors, and ensuring consistency with relevant International Mine Action Standards, as well as national mine action standards.

UNICEF and other partners have been working towards the achievement of above commitments over the past years. A lot has been achieved to date in terms of improving approaches and methodologies of Mine Risk Education; however, to continue enhancing the value of MRE, it is worth to highlight a number of observations since the First Review Conference and the Nairobi Action Plan. These are broadly in line with the more general shift in thinking on mine action, including the move towards a more integrated mine action. It should also be noted that each country has its own specific context and the lessons learned in one context may not necessarily be relevant in another. Some of the common observations by UNICEF and other partners on MRE in specific include the following:

- (i) MRE is stronger and more effective when it is integrated with other mine action activities and implemented as part of a mine action package. This, however, may not

be practical in emergencies and/or in contexts where there are no other mine action activities.

- (ii) MRE strategies and approaches are more effective when they adopt ongoing data collection, assessments, analysis and monitoring and evaluation as part of its programming and when they are tailored to the needs of at-risk populations in a specific context.
- (iii) MRE has been able to reinforce efforts under other mine action pillars, most notably victim assistance and clearance such as sharing collected information and making a link between victims and health care providers, assisting victims reach hospital/rehab centers, gathering data in support of survey and clearance.
- (iv) Sustained community participation in MRE activities is essential in contexts where communities are living on a long-term basis with contamination. Community participation is important for all MRE activities, but it does not have to be sustained where the threat is short-term.

The above points help us identify ways to maximise the value of MRE efforts in the future. In order to do so the following points are recommended:

- (i) Action 21 of the Nairobi Action Plan remains relevant in a number of aspects, including that MRE programs should take into consideration age, gender, social, economic, political and geographical factors
- (ii) Mine action in general and MRE in specific should strengthen its efforts to incorporate ongoing data collection, assessments and analysis as part of its program planning, priority-setting, implementation and selection of tools and methodologies. MRE needs to be tailored to the context and needs of each individual situation.
- (iii) Monitoring and evaluation of MRE activities need to be strengthened so that their outcomes and impact can be better gauged. Specific objectives and indicators for risk education activities need to be set and progress towards those objectives and indicators measured and evaluated. MRE should make use of experience from other established disciplines such as public health.
- (iv) MRE should continue to have a multi-disciplinary approach to its interventions and to ensure that its activities are delivered within a broader risk reduction framework based on the needs of a target community.
- (v) The mine action community, including the development and donor community, national authorities and individual operators, should continue to invest in MRE and its associated activities to support broader mine action goals and to safeguard populations both in emergencies and post-conflict settings.