Mine Action in Mauritania

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Mine Action in Mauritania

Conflict with neighbouring Western Sahara has left Mauritania with a significant landmining problem: the country has taken steps to reduce the impact of mines, and with international help, hopes to be rid of this scourge in time to meet its Ottawa-mandated deadline.

The mine- and unexploded ordnance outbreak in Mauritania stems from its involvement in the conflict in Western Sahara. After Spanish withdrawal, Mauritania occupied the southern third of this country from 1975 to 1978. Along with Moroccan forces, Mauritania fought the Polisario Front for independence movement for the region. The exact scope and limits of the mine problem in Mauritania are currently undefined because no Landmine Impact Survey has been conducted, and recent data and information gathering has been lacking. Mauritania, Morocco and Mauritania all engage in heavy mining, primarily around urban centres and key economic areas.

 Mines and explosive remnants of war are found in the northern part of the country in the regions of Dakhil Dakhla, Nouadhibou, and Tinti Zinouer, around医务 the urban centres of Nouadhibou, Zoueratt and Bir Moghreb. Mines and UXO have been found close to the towns of Choum, F’derick, Boulenoir and Brik Coke, and at more remote locations all along the northern and western borders. A variety of mine types are present in Mauritania, although the most common are the French API mine (anti-personnel) and ACED M1 (anti-tank).

The mine situation has a double impact on the lives of nomads and people well known for their freedom of mobility, moving daily, following their camels in the desert.

Impact of Mines and UXO

Since the end of the war in 1978, the military engineers have been responsible for clearing mines in Mauritania. Between 1979 and 1999 these efforts resulted in the destruction of approximately 7,000 mines and 5,000 pieces of UXO. This clearance was conducted with limited technical resources and utilizing military techniques.

In 1999, the military adopted standard operating procedures for humanitarian mine clearance. These standards have improved the safety and quality of the clearance itself, but rigid adherence to foreign standards has drastically reduced the clearance results. After reunifying the Mauritania government, the BNHD approached many donors in order to raise funds for implementing all the

Mauritanian National Capital

- 120 donuts (199 by mail 2004)
- 12 demining instructors
- 6 mine-awareness instructors
- Specific equipment for clearance (detectors, vehicles, etc.)
- With support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the BNHD has installed the Information Management System for Mine Action databases.

Conclusion

Mauritania can be free of landmines in a short time with a little support from the UNDP and the international community.

With this much-needed support, it should be possible for Mauritania to meet its completion initiative by January 2011.

See Estimates, page 109

Mauritania has obtained the assistance of a Senior Technical Advisor from the United Nations Development Programme and has deployed a clear strategy and transparency in mine action.

Challenges

Shifting dunes. Many landmines are known to be covered by dunes in the desert and sometimes close to urban areas like Zoueratt. As a result, it is very difficult for them to have an accurate database. The dunes are constantly moving; one day the mines are visible and the following day the dunes cover them to a point deeper than normal for buried mines. This presents a challenge in clearance because mine detectors may not work to these depths. Mauritania is approaching other programmes and specialized institutes for example the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, to learn how to best handle this situation.

Fundraising. To date, the main funding source for Mauritania mine action is the Mauritanian government. The Mauritian programme for mine action has had difficulty getting financial support from the international community because it lacks the resources to effectively sell the programme needs and the progress that is being made. To combat this problem, Mauritania has obtained the assistance of a Senior Technical Advisor from the United Nations Development Programme and has deployed a clear strategy and transparency in mine action.


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