

# Conventional Munitions Disposal Capacity Development in South Sudan

The United Nations Mine Action Service is training members of South Sudan's National Police Service in order to develop a self-sustainable nationwide capacity for conventional munitions disposal in the country.

by Commandant Fran O'Grady [ Defence Forces Ireland ]

South Sudan's struggle to nationhood included two rounds of civil strife spanning almost 40 years (1955–1972 and 1983–2005)—the longest war in African history. With euphoria and high expectations, South Sudan gained independence 9 July 2011, but its split from Sudan has been difficult. Despite a massive influx of international aid, the nation remains one of the most impoverished and least developed in the world. The ongoing violence and intra-governmental fighting in South Sudan is deeply rooted in historical divisions, and power struggles continue among political protagonists.

Further, development statistics indicate that more than 50 percent of the South Sudanese live below the poverty line, national life expectancy is 42 years of age and maternal mortality is the highest in the world.<sup>1</sup> The Small Arms Survey notes that a 2006 survey recording 2,054 deaths per 100,000 live births may have been an underestimation.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, South Sudan inherited vast amounts of land contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). As the South Sudanese address the monumental task of nation building, the need to clear these hazardous areas is a priority. In response, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) began a three-year initiative in 2013 to train selected members of South Sudan's police service in order to establish a national capacity for conventional munitions disposal (CMD)—a joint project supported by the Irish Defence Forces, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, the United Nations Police and the National Mine Action Authority.

## Bridging the Gap

The desired end state for the UNMAS capacity development initiative is the establishment of a self-sustainable,



A CMD team member conducts a disposal task.  
All photos courtesy of UNMAS South Sudan team.

nationwide CMD capability for the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS). To achieve this, trained police CMD teams must be available and deployable to all 10 states (with a total of 78 counties) in South Sudan. The goal is to field 78 teams, one for each county.

## CMD Training

The eight-week pilot training of the first SSNPS CMD course commenced in mid-September 2013, and three teams deployed to the Greater Bar El Ghazal region (namely, Western Bar El Ghazal, Warrap and Lakes states) in early November. The course work of future CMD trainings will incorporate lessons learned from the pilot course (administrative, logistic and training). The plan is to conduct approximately four of these eight-week courses each year for three years. The best students from these courses will subsequently undertake train-the-trainer courses, thereby facilitating the handover for the responsibility for all CMD training to SSNPS in 2016.

One fundamental lesson learned involved the pace of instruction, which needed specific tailoring to the South



Members of the Irish Defence Forces training team brief students on the demolition range.

Sudanese context since many participants had limited education. The consideration of education levels, previous courses completed and language barriers was integral when determining the duration of the training. Student Charles Noon commented, “Before this course I had only primary school. These lectures and calculations are new to me and very difficult, but I am learning and my [weekly course assessment] results are getting better.”<sup>3</sup>

This technical and difficult course could not be rushed if students were to thoroughly learn the material. The initial stages of the course demonstrated that strict adherence to length requirements for class periods may not be helpful. Instead, a more flexible approach to time management was adopted, which ensured that the students finished the class only after acquiring a firm understanding of the material. For instance, lessons originally planned for 40 minutes were allowed to last more than an hour to ensure that students grasped the concepts.

All lectures, lesson plans and tutorials were reconstructed to fit into a flexible timetable. The objective was to create an environment-specific training framework that would include tasks the teams might face during operations. By maintaining this continuous cycle of course review and refinement, the training program can evolve and succeed. UNMAS staff member and CMD operator Rambo Isaac is a South Sudanese national and works as a translator when needed. He says, “We are all [staff and students] learning every day on this course in our own different ways. This is a dangerous job that the

students are being trained to do and it is very important that the students and staff communicate well. The students must feel comfortable at all times to speak up if they don’t understand something. This is a two-way process.”<sup>4</sup>

Typically, demining operations consist of large-scale, pre-planned deployments of demining teams that systematically clear defined hazardous areas over an extended period of time. This generally involves a significant logistical footprint as well as assets such as mechanical mine flails or tillers and mine detection dogs.

Although CMD operator and deminer skill sets overlap, SSNPS CMD teams are not structured, trained or tasked like demining teams. In contrast, these small CMD teams are meant to provide flexible, mobile and timely responses to unexploded ordnance (UXO) disposal requests in countries where they are based. For example, in the event that a mortar bomb is reported in a village, the local CMD team will deploy from its police station to the site, liaise locally, identify the hazard, cordon the area, dispose of the mortar, return to the police station and provide a technical report through the relevant channels.

Isaac captures the relationship between these discrete but interrelated functions: “The idea is that the demining teams and police CMD teams will complement each other operationally ... [t]hey are just different tools in the toolbox that hopes to fix the [mine and ERW] problem here in South Sudan.”<sup>4</sup>

The course is based out of the Rajaf Police Training Centre, near the nation’s capital Juba. UNMAS funded and

constructed classroom facilities, training offices and demolition ranges in Rajaf to provide better facilities for course conduct. In line with the desired end state, this self-contained CMD training facility will be handed over to SSNPS in time, a move that will be made easier by its proximity to the activity center of South Sudan's national police.

### A Holistic Approach

While visiting the first SSNPS CMD course, UNMAS Director Agnès Marcaillou said, "We are training them [SSNPS] because the international community will not stay in South Sudan forever. The international community at some point will transfer the responsibility of this disposal and of the safety of its people to the country itself."<sup>5</sup> The initiative is due to transfer by 2016.

UNMAS plans to first establish a solid CMD capacity before beginning a phased transfer of responsibility to SSNPS, with 2016 as a provisional handover date for full ownership of the training. To this end, a holistic approach was adopted that considers the actual CMD training and addresses issues such as field mentoring, standard-operation-procedures development, train-the-

trainer course conduct, administrative assistance, logistical support and technical guidance.

### The Way Forward: Sustainability

In mid-December 2013, conflict erupted in South Sudan between pro-government and anti-government forces. Although talks between both parties have resulted in a signed ceasefire, ethnically fueled violence continues in parts of the Upper Nile region. However, the Equatoria and Greater Bar El Ghazal regions have stabilized. These events affected police CMD training, like many other capacity development initiatives in South Sudan. Rescheduling the second CMD course to commence in early April 2014 became necessary due to realities on the ground.

Nevertheless, SSNPS continues embracing the UNMAS capacity development initiative, and this future support is critical to its overall success. These UNMAS-led training courses for CMD teams are only the first step in this process. The police service must clearly understand the capacity under development, if it is to be resourced and tasked appropriately. The effective deployment of police CMD teams to communities

for the purpose of UXO disposal should remain the primary goal.

Real sustainability will require SSNPS to take full ownership of this project in the years to come and responsibility to meet the challenges that will indubitably arise. Col. Deng, senior officer and SSNPS contact for the initiative, says, "We [SSNPS] greatly welcome the Irish team. They work very hard and encourage us always to work hard as a team too. The instructors and students respect and support each other—we are in this together. They are teaching us everything we need to know to help clear UXO from South Sudan. We look forward to being responsible for conducting this training ourselves in a few years."<sup>6</sup>

UNMAS remains committed to working with the SSNPS to drive this life-saving, capacity development initiative forward with a view to deploying police CMD teams throughout South Sudan over the coming years. ©

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A student practicing CMD drills in a local village.



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