

Franco-Mines: A French-language Forum for Mine Action and Other Explosive Devices

by Manuel Gonzal - [view pdf](#)

In 2005 the United Nations Development Programme – Africa organized the Socio-Economic Approaches to Mine Action Planning and Management Regional Workshop for Africa at the International Mine Action Training Centre in Nairobi. This workshop aimed to study socioeconomic approaches to mine action. Although the course was taught in English, only eight of the 25 trainees were native English speakers. Of the other 17 trainees, four were Portuguese speakers and 13 spoke French. This inspired three French-speaking participants involved in mine action to create a virtual space for French speakers to express their thoughts and concerns.

The screenshot shows the Franco-Mines website interface. At the top, the logo 'FRANCO MINES' is displayed next to the tagline 'Le site francophone des actions contre les mines et les REG'. Below this is a horizontal navigation menu with various categories. The main body of the page features a large image of a mine on the left and a text column on the right. The text column includes an 'Edito' (Editorial) section with a date '03/04/2012' and a 'Dernières news' (Latest news) section with a date '03/04/2012'. The text in the 'Edito' section discusses the challenges of mine action and the role of the forum.

The Franco-Mines website and forum.

This French-language forum—*Franco-Mines, Le Forum Francophone des Actions Contre Les Mines et Autres Engins Explosifs*—which began in January 2007, represents an effort to make mine action more accessible to French speakers, both within and outside of the field. Similarly, it reflects an effort to promote French-speaking mine action programs around the world. To access the forum visit: <http://franco-mines.com>.

The forum's main topics include

- Press releases in French about mine action
- Lessons learned from the field
- International Mine Action Standards and Standard Operating Procedures
- Job offers from organizations, including MAG (Mines Advisory Group), G4S, RONCO Consulting Corporation, Handicap International, UNDP and United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)¹
- Explosive remnants of war identification
- New technologies.

As of September 2012, Franco-Mines had 493 members around the world and plans to reach 500 members by the end of 2012. Franco-Mines is a free forum consisting of a mailing list to which members subscribe. The moderator previews messages yet strives to permit freedom of speech and maintain forum member anonymity when necessary.

The forum's main challenges include:

- Maintaining forum integrity while preserving freedom of speech
- Offering informal help for those seeking employment
- Providing technical support
- Encouraging discussion among participants
- Maintaining the anonymity of members who request it
- Maintaining confidential information, such as restricted technical data



A Mechem deminer in Senegal, 2012.

Numerous explosive ordnance disposal personnel and others working in mine action benefit from the network and the advice of its professional members. Requests for assistance in identifying ERW rarely remain unanswered due to the proactive nature of the forum's participants. To date the forum has proven to be especially useful in Libya, where forum members communicated through it for safety reasons.

This forum is not limited to the French-speaking world and creating mine action forums in Arabic or Spanish is under consideration. 🌐

Biographies



Manuel Gonzal began his mine-clearing profession during the First Gulf War in 1991 while serving with the French Foreign Legion. After 17 years with the Foreign Legion, he became a technical adviser for Handicap International in Lyon, France. Beginning in 2006, he has run various mine action missions in Sudan for DanChurchAid, in Guinea- Bissau for Cleared Ground Demining, in Colombia for TRANSTEC / EU, and in Afghanistan and Chad for MineTech International. Since June 2009, he has worked as the chief technical adviser and operations for the United Nations Development Programme in Casamance, Senegal.


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Endnotes

1. "List of IMAS." *International Mine Action Standards*. <http://www.mineactionstandards.org/international-standards/imas-in-english/list-of-imas>. Accessed 25 September 2012.

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