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United Nations Mine Action Service

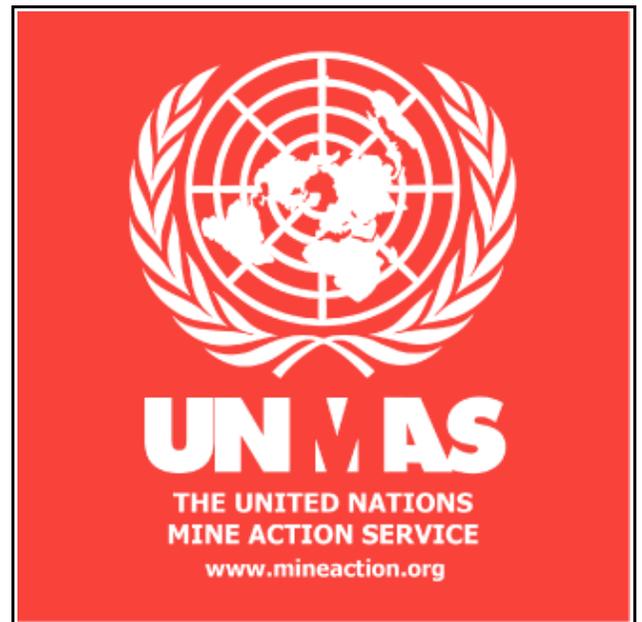
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Established in 1997 by the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Mine Action Service is located within the U.N.'s Department of Peacekeeping's Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions. Since its inception, UNMAS has served as the hub for mine action in the United Nations. While helping to wage a collective front against landmines and other explosive remnants of war, UNMAS assists in reintegrating those affected by conflict to their normal lives.¹

Mine Action

Every year, landmines and other ERW kill and injure countless numbers of people across the globe. In 2009, more than 65 countries were affected by landmines or ERW. These devices devastate individuals and communities alike by closing roads, preventing access to school or work, "hampering social and economic development and effectively robbing people of their livelihoods."² Before post-conflict reconstruction can begin in countries affected by ERW, landmine removal must take place. To help facilitate reconstruction, UNMAS has become a global advocate and supporter of landmine removal.²

Since 1997, UNMAS has helped the U.N. work towards its vision of "a world free of the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance, where individuals and communities live in a safe environment conducive to development, and where mine survivors are fully integrated into their societies."¹ In addition to planning and implementing mine-action projects, UNMAS participates in mine clearance and mine-risk education in countries where peacekeeping or humanitarian operations are needed.¹ UNMAS has headquarters in both New York and Geneva, Switzerland, and "provides technical, financial and operational support and policy direction to its field offices and partner organizations during peacekeeping situations and complex emergencies or at the request of governments."²



UNMAS also manages mine-action coordination centers that are responsible for important tasks such as the collection of landmine and causality data, public information and community liaison operations, destruction and removal of ERW and other abandoned explosive ordnance, and victim-assistance initiatives.¹ UNMAS currently manages mine-action coordination centers or provides governmental support in advisory roles in Afghanistan, Chad, Colombia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Libya, the occupied Palestinian territories, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Western Sahara.³



The UN Mine Action Service working in Lebanon.
Photo courtesy of UNMAS.

Funding

According to the 14th edition of the Portfolio of Mine Action Projects, in 2011, the United Nations received requests for more than US\$498 million for mine-action initiatives, including peacekeeping missions in 29 countries or territories. Of these requests, 26.3 percent of the projects received funding.⁴ As a nonprofit organization, UNMAS activities are supported primarily in two ways: through appropriations by the U.N. General Assembly for the mine-action components of peacekeeping missions and through extra-budgetary contributions to the U.N. Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action.³ This trust fund supports programs that evaluate the level of a country's problems with landmines and ERW. Since 1998, the fund has received more than \$620 million in assistance.¹

According to UNMAS information officer Aaron Buckley, "We often have the necessary equipment [and] expertise and are only limited in how fast we implement our projects by the level of funding. We are conscious of the current global economic climate and consistently evaluate and recalibrate the strategic execution of our programs and allocation of our resources so that we can do more with less."³

Achievements

In addition to helping save lives, organizations such as UNMAS do more than coordinate clearance efforts. Their support of mine-action programs includes teaching people how to protect themselves from landmines and ERW.⁴ According to Buckley, though more work needs to be done, some of UNMAS' greatest achievements include mine-action efforts in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan.³

Since 2005, collective efforts in Sudan have reopened more than 27,961 miles (45,000 kilometers) of road. This reopening of roads has increased mobility, reclaimed land and revived trade.⁵ UNMAS mine-risk-education programs annually reach more than 100,000 people in Somalia and more than 330,000 people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.³ In Afghanistan, the U.N. creates jobs by employing more than 15,000 Afghans in mine-action efforts.³

Despite setbacks and complications, which include working in "very challenging security environments" in Afghanistan, Libya, and the occupied Palestinian territories for example, UNMAS continues to make strides in the war against landmines and ERW.³ According to Buckley, the mine-action program in Lebanon recently cleared more than 150,000 submunitions scattered around southern Lebanon by Israeli-fired cluster bombs during the summer 2006 war.³ In turn, nearly one million internally displaced persons and refugees were able to return home safely.

UNMAS will continue to advance its "vision of a world where individuals and communities live in a safe environment conducive to development, where the needs of victims are met and where survivors are fully integrated into their societies" in countries affected by landmines and ERW.⁶ To find out more and how to help, visit www.mineaction.org. Remember that each year April 4 is celebrated as International Mine Awareness Day. To create landmine awareness in 2012, UNMAS created a global campaign it called "Lend Your Leg." The campaign was a unique electronic photo project. Visit www.lendyourleg.org to learn more. 

~ Megan Reichart, CISR staff

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Endnotes

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