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Clearing Minefields in Israel and the West Bank

Recent legislation in Israel has opened the door to demining in Israel and the West Bank. Roots of Peace campaigned for this legislation and will begin demining a village near Bethlehem before the end of 2011.

by Dhyan Or and Heidi Kühn | Roots of Peace |

The Mine-Free Israel campaign, a humanitarian effort led by a coalition of organizations comprised of Roots of Peace, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Center for Regional Councils, Council for a Beautiful Israel, local authorities from mine-affected communities and landmine survivors, has paved the way for humanitarian demining in Israel and the West Bank. The campaign recently helped pass unprecedented mine-action legislation in Israel and raise public awareness about mines in the West Bank. According to the new law, the Israeli government established a national mine-action authority, with an annual budget of 27 million NIS (US$7.3 million), scheduled to begin humanizing demining areas classified as Area C administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Between 1949 and 1967, a Jordanian police station surrounded by a mixed minefield and an area of 1,800 acres (7.4 sq. km.), 87 percent of which are classified as Area C11 administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Between 1949 and 1967, a Jordanian police station surrounded by a mixed minefield and an area of 1,800 acres (7.4 sq. km.), 87 percent of which are classified as Area C11 administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Between 1949 and 1967, a Jordanian police station surrounded by a mixed minefield and an area of 1,800 acres (7.4 sq. km.), 87 percent of which are classified as Area C11 administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Between 1949 and 1967, a Jordanian police station surrounded by a mixed minefield and an area of 1,800 acres (7.4 sq. km.), 87 percent of which are classified as Area C11 administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Between 1949 and 1967, a Jordanian police station surrounded by a mixed minefield and an area of 1,800 acres (7.4 sq. km.), 87 percent of which are classified as Area C11 administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. 12

Minefield History

More than 1.5 million landmines laid during the 1950s and 1960s contaminate a combined area of 50,000 acres (200 square kilometers) in the Golan Heights, in the Arava Valley and along the Jordan River. This includes more than 300,000 landmines contaminating 5,000 acres (20 sq. km.) of agricultural and residential land in the West Bank, with unexplored ordnance further making sites inaccessible. 13

Mineral regions in the area include some religious and World Heritage sites of high significance to Christianity, Islam and Judaism, especially the site known as Qur'at Ya-hud (Palace of the Jews) where many believe Jesus was baptized, 14 and the Jordan River and Prophet Elijah is believed to have ascended into heaven. 15 Approximately 3,000 anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, as well as booby traps, surround ancient monasteries and places of worship belonging to a variety of religions and held sacred by billions of people around the world. 16

Husan is a Palestinian village located about 4 miles (6 km) west of Bethlehem and 6 miles (10 km) southeast of Jerusalem, with a population of 6,000 people, 17 half of which are children, and an area of 1,800 acres (7.4 sq. km.), 87 percent of which are classified as Area C11 administered solely by Israel. The remaining area is classified as Area B, jointly administered by both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. 18 Between 1949 and 1967, a Jordanian police station surrounded by a mixed minefield (containing both AT and AP mines) 19 overlooked the Jordanian-Israeli border from a hill within Husan. In 1993, when a bypass road (No. 375) was paved through the minefield to connect Beit Sira with Jerusalem, it split the minefield into two parts: one part, south of the road, is fenced and marked and consists of 4.5 acres (18,211 square meters) of grazing and agricultural land; and the second part, north of the road, within a residential area of Husan, consists of 1.5 acres (6,670 sq. m.), and is unmarked, posing a constant threat to residents, especially children, who pass through it daily. Traces of an old barbed-wire fence, as well as one worn-out yellow sign can be found around this minefield. 20 Over the years, several mine incidents have occurred in Husan, resulting in loss of lives and limbs.

In the past 20 years, several attempts at partially demining the area were made without success.

In August 2000, British demining nongovernmental organization MAG (Mines Advisory Group) completed a technical assessment of the Husan minefields for the Canadian Landmine Foundation and planned to conduct a 12-week clearance of the contaminated area, but the clearance was put on hold due to the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Uprising (Intifada). In June 2001, during this Intifada, the Israeli military bulldozed two small sections of the southern minefield in order to erect a watchtower on a hilltop overlooking Husan. Additionally, the military shoveled mine-contaminated soil onto the northern minefield to allow the erection of a metal fence between Husan and the bypass road to protect cars from Intifada stone-throwers. 21 This redistribution of dirt and contaminants further polluted the northern minefield.

In 2002, at the urging of the NGO World Vision and the Palestinian charity Health Work Committees, MAG attempted to conduct demining in Husan but failed to secure the Israeli authorities' approval and the project did not materialize. 22 Once the Intifada subsided, the Israeli courts granted permission to the landowners residing along the edge of the northern minefield to clear the contaminated land. The Israeli military insisted that only a designated, army-approved private Israeli firm could conduct the demining, and local residents would have to bear the cost, which was well above their means. Then in 2010, Israeli advocacy group Yesh Din approached private Israeli demining firms on behalf of local residents to find one that would be able to complete the work for a cost that local residents would be able to bear. Even though Yesh Din found a military-approved firm to demine Husan, this firm's estimated cost to complete the work was unaffordable, and the firm required landowners to sign a No-Shop Agreement prohibiting them from obtaining a more competitive bid. 23

Palestinian youth cycles past a minefield near Bethlehem. Photo courtesy of Roots of Peace.
2004 failed due to lack of public support. However, after an intensive public-relations campaign inspired by 11-year-old local landmine survivor Daniel Yuval who lost his leg to a landmine in the Golan Heights in 2010, 73 out of 80 rank-and-file members of parliament cosponsored the Minefield Clearance Act which was eventually passed, with active support of the government and the Prime Minister on 14 March 2011. According to the new legislation, the Israeli National Mine Action Authority was established, and tasked with the creation and implementation of the first national humanitarian-demining plan. In September 2011 INMAA published the first draft of the national mine-action standards, held a first meeting of its advisory committee, which includes members of government offices and public representatives, and announced two pilot projects in the upper Arava Valley to be conducted in 2012.

Demine-Replant-Rebuild Initiative in the West Bank

According to Israeli and international law, the Israeli law does not apply to the West Bank, where the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Defense Forces have shared control of civilian and security affairs. Still, the recent policy shift was welcomed by both the PA and the IDF, and raised expectations for a parallel change in mine-action policy in the West Bank. In Husan, local residents, who have been disappointed time and again after failed appeals for the removal of the constant threat of landmines from the midst of their village, are expressing renewed confidence in the possibility of realizing this wish. Once cleared, the land could be returned to productive use, helping boost local economy, which is characterized by high unemployment rates. Following clearance, the local community is planning to replant olive trees, expand the homes of the large families living around the

Welcome to the CISR Sphere!

The Center for International Stabilization and Recovery has historically been the information clearinghouse for humanitarian-demining activities. Heidi Kühn, founder of Roots of Peace, calls The Journal of ERW and Mine Action "The pre-eminent source for strategic, global landmine removal." With the recent addition of The CISR Sphere, The Journal takes information-sharing to the next level through an easily accessible social network. The mine-action community can now gather, network and absorb the latest in mine-action news online in a number of new ways.

Check out what’s happening in THE CISR SPHERE.

AN ONLINE GATHERING PLACE FOR THE ERW & MINE-ACTION COMMUNITY.

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Landowners view the mined area around their homes. Photo courtesy of Roots of Peace.
The Impact of ERW on Children

Known as killing fields in Cambodia and devil’s gardens in Afghanistan, areas contaminated with explosive remnants of war pose for children worldwide. The discussion of children’s physical susceptibility and the psychological and socioeconomic effects that accompany wounds and disabilities provides a broad picture of the impact ERW have on children. The article also explores rehabilitative support, as several sources provide a variety of recovery strategies that focus on community support for the future well-being of child survivors.

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