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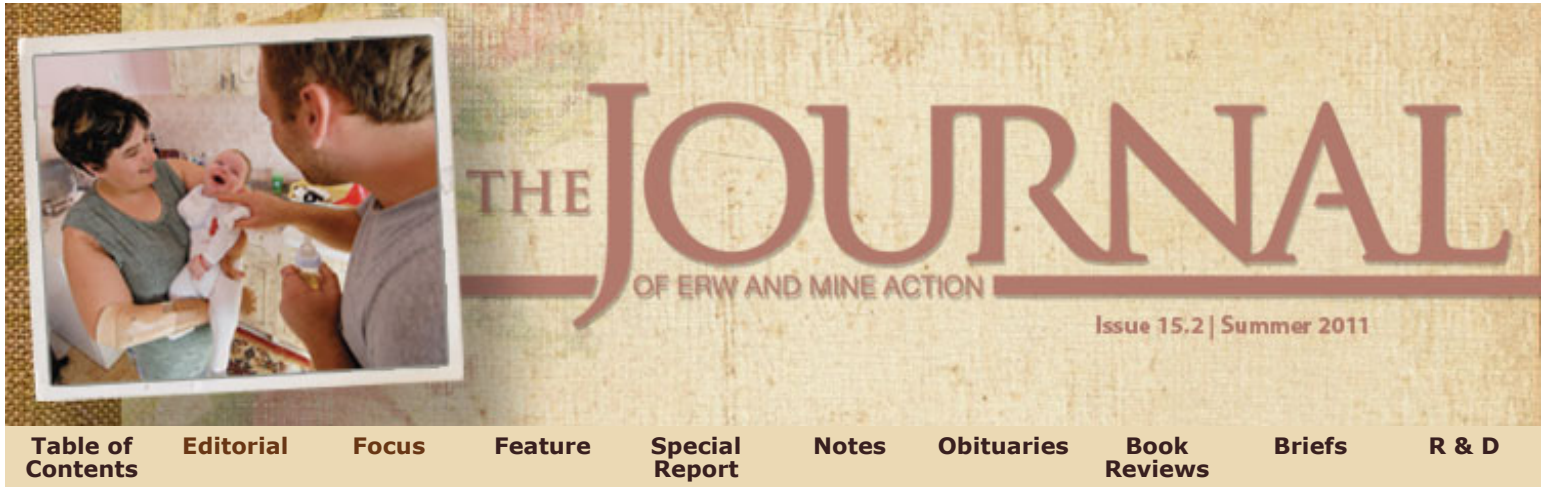


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Daniel Yuval: A Survivor's Hope

Just a little more than a year since an explosion blew off his right leg, Daniel Yuval has experienced unprecedented success in prompting Israel to take action against landmines. His call to the Israeli Parliament, as well as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to remove landmines has resulted in a majority-sponsored bill in Parliament to establish a landmine-removal agency.

In February 2010, Daniel Yuval was a typical 11-year-old boy playing in the freshly fallen snow along the Golan Heights.



Daniel Yuval and Chair of State Comptroller Committee during

In February 2010, Daniel Yuval was a typical 11-year-old boy playing in the freshly fallen snow along the Golan Heights. Together with many others, Daniel's family stopped to enjoy the snow-covered fields of the Mount Avital nature reserve, unaware they had entered a live minefield. When an explosion left Daniel maimed and his sister Amit injured by shrapnel, it was the first the family knew of the minefield. As the other families fled the field, Daniel's father, Guy, recalls realizing they were "suddenly alone now. And we were in the middle of a minefield."¹

Daniel's first-hand experience with minefields has driven him to become an advocate and an inspiration within mine action and the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. In a letter addressed to the Knesset, he wrote, "I told my Mum that I wanted no one else to ever be hurt by a landmine, and that I mean to do something about that." Daniel has since spoken with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, met with several Knesset members and lectured at many high-profile events worldwide. In December 2010, Daniel spoke at the 11th Meeting of States Parties to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and their Destruction* (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC) in Geneva, Switzerland. He related the physical and emotional pain that landmines had inflicted not only upon himself but also on his family. He said, "Stepping on a landmine is terrible. It's scary and painful, not just for me, but for my mum and dad and my whole family."² However, he remains optimistic. Like many Israelis, he has watched Jordan clear away its minefields along its side of the Israeli-Jordanian border. Despite Israel and Jordan suffering from similar levels of landmine contamination just a few years ago,

Teliviv Mine Free Day 2011.
Photo courtesy of Dhyran Or/Roots for Peace.

Jordan expects to be mine-impact free by 2012.^{3,4} Daniel believes this can become a reality for Israel as well. While Israel is in the process of establishing a national mine-action authority to supervise the clearance of landmines in several affected areas, the Israeli Parliament still has not signed the APMBC which mandates the clearance of all known AP minefields within 10 years of signing the convention.⁵

With Daniel's help, the Israeli movement to remove landmines has gained significant momentum. Dr. Kenneth Rutherford, Director of the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery and fellow landmine survivor, met with Daniel after his Geneva speech. Rutherford noted that Daniel's call to action has "generated an extraordinary response from Israeli civil society, top Knesset members, military officials and government ministers."⁶



Daniel Yuval with (from left to right): Dr. Ken Rutherford, Guy Yuval (father), Jerry White, Tali Yuval (mother) and Amit (sister).
Photo courtesy of Ken Rutherford/CISR.

In the past, the Israeli government had defended its landmine use along its borders as a necessity for national security. It is now believed that many of these landmines no longer serve their defensive purposes, but the Israeli government has resisted clearing the minefields due to both security concerns and a reluctance to cover the costs. Another consideration that has hindered Israel's mine-clearance progress is the worry that other countries will someday lay claim to lands cleared by Israel. Because the international community still considers the affected areas in the Golan Heights as occupied territory, the possibility remains that these lands may someday return to Syria, which has caused great reluctance among Israeli officials to make such a massive investment in the region. Yet Daniel's story and efforts, along with the work of Mine-Free Israel, a coordinated campaign to lobby Israel's government for mine clearance, have made inroads into these political roadblocks. On March 16, 2011 the Knesset unanimously passed unprecedented mine-action legislation, the Minefield Clearance Act, 2011 (nicknamed "Danny's Law"), establishing a humanitarian-demining authority to remove all nonoperational minefields.

The bill began with the sponsorship of 73 Knesset members and unanimously passed its preliminary reading in the Knesset on 8 February 2011. The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee then revisited the bill before returning it to the Knesset, where it was passed on the House floor. The final bill establishes the National Authority for Land Mine Clearance, a civilian body under the auspices of the Israeli Defense Ministry tasked to contract and coordinate mine clearance by private companies in mine action. The funding for the authority will be guaranteed at NIS 27 million (US\$7.8 million)⁷ annually; in addition, the Israeli government will establish a fund for donations from states, nongovernmental organizations and other organizations.⁸ The bill ultimately calls for the removal of nearly 90 percent of Israel's landmines which will open key tourist and agricultural areas to people in many regions, including Galilee and the Golan Heights.⁹

Jerry White, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and landmine survivor, says, "It has always been important to remind people that this is

about people."¹⁰ Daniel has seemed to embody this idea by forcing the Israeli public and government to face the threat posed by landmines to ordinary citizens. In a conference held the day before the bill's preliminary reading in February in the Knesset, Netanyahu thanked Daniel for his efforts to raise awareness for Israeli mine action. The Prime Minister said in regards to Daniel's work on the bill, "It's right, and it's just for Israel. You have given us a strong spirit."⁹ Daniel's work to ensure protection from the danger of landmines is inspirational for many. Marveling at Daniel's efforts, Rutherford says, "He has used his tragedy to improve the lives of landmine survivors and prevent similar tragedies for future generations."⁶



Daniel has high expectations for the future of Israeli landmine removal. He hopes Israel will begin clearing its AP mines by the time he graduates from high school.¹ In closing, he based his goals for Israel on the progress made by neighboring Jordan which works tirelessly to clear its minefields. Daniel said, "I hope Israel will be next. I hope soon all the world will be free from landmines."² ↴

~Julia Mitchell, CISR Staff

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Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
Mine Action Information Center
James Madison University
E-mail: maic(at)jmu.edu

Endnotes

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