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# Building Knowledge and Partnerships in ERW Action

As Jordan nears the completion of its mine-clearance activities, its national authority is working to reinvent itself as an international center of expertise in mine and explosive-remnants-of-war action. With funding from the United States Department of State, Jordan's National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation developed a comprehensive training course for senior managers to help other countries replicate Jordan's success in dealing with mines and ERW.

by Jonah Shepp [ Independent Consultant ]

Since its nascence in the early 1990s, Jordan's mine-action program has evolved from an earnest but haphazard jumble of military clearance operations to a robust, concerted effort that brings together civil and military, governmental and nongovernmental actors, and encompasses mine and explosive-remnants-of-war clearance, as well as land verification, risk education, public outreach and victim assistance.

At its current pace, Jordan is on track to meet its May 2012 deadline for fulfilling its obligations to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (Ottawa Convention). Yet, motivated by the belief that landmines and ERW are not only a national challenge but a global concern, Jordan's mine-action center, the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation, has sought a means of retaining, utilizing and passing on the expertise its staff has acquired in the 10 years since its establishment.

## NCDR

With this goal in mind, NCDR Chairman Prince Mired Raad Zeid Al Hussein put forth a new NCDR vision to develop a regional and international mine/ERW-action training center.

The NCDR had already begun taking on a global leadership role, most notably when Jordan hosted the Eighth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in 2007. However, the first initiative carried out as part of the Committee's new mission began in 2009, when the NCDR launched its first ERW International Training Course for Senior Managers.



NCDR Internal Quality Control and Reporting Officer Basem Al Kasasbeh (center) discusses an on-site case study with participants in the 2010 ERWTC during a field visit to the Jordan Valley. All photos courtesy of Oumima Alyamany.

## ERWTC Senior Managers' Course

With two years' funding from the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), and supported in-kind by NCDR's institutional partners, the ERWTC sought to provide comprehensive training to senior managers at mine- and ERW-action organizations around the world.

Instructors in the four-week training course were drawn from the College of Business and the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery/Mine Action Information Center at James Madison University, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the International Committee of the Red Cross,



Participants in the 2010 ERWTC work together on a group project. The training course relies extensively on group work, which allows participants to get to know each other better and to learn from their colleagues' diverse backgrounds.

and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as from the NCDR itself. Inviting instructors from a variety of backgrounds and organizations was central to the NCDR's effort to provide a truly comprehensive training program. In addition, participants became familiar with several of the international institutions working in mine/ERW action, met key staff from these organizations and learned about their work, thus enabling them to expand their network of contacts and perhaps lay the foundation for future collaboration.

The course curriculum covered a broad topic range. Half of the course was dedicated to applying management concepts proven to be successful in the private sector to leadership in humanitarian mine/ERW action. Other sections addressed subject matter specific to the participants' work, such as technical issues related to ERW clearance, risk education, victim assistance, and relevant international laws and conventions.

Inspired by similar training courses held at JMU, the ERWTC, the first senior management training course held in a mine-affected country, also added value to the participants' classroom experience by allowing them to see first hand how a successful mine-action organization like the NCDR operates in the office and the field.

Furthermore, holding the course in Jordan was a capacity-building exercise for the NCDR: It was an opportunity for its staff to build its skills as leaders and teachers, in addition to South-South cooperation, which promotes development through sharing technology, knowledge or other resources between developing countries, as opposed to leadership or intervention by developed countries.

The course also aimed at sustainable knowledge capture and transfer, with the hope that ERWTC participants would retain as much of what they learned as possible and pass it on to their colleagues in their

own countries. Accordingly, the ERWTC included field visits to the NCDR's offices in Amman and its ongoing mine-clearance and verification projects in the Jordan Valley and Jordan's North Border Region, as well as to post-clearance development sites in the Jordan Valley. The second course (held in 2010) included a trip to Aqaba, where deminers from the Naval Component of the Belgian Armed Forces demonstrated underwater demining, a key concern for many countries that suffer mine and ERW contamination in coastal regions.

## Participants

The first ERWTC was held from October to November 2009 at the United Nations University in Amman. The NCDR selected 30 participants from a variety of countries,<sup>1</sup> ages and working backgrounds to allow participants to learn from each other's experiences in mine-action work. A component of the ERWTC rationale is that it should be an opportunity for participants to build their knowledge and skills, and form friendships that can translate into future transnational working partnerships. As senior managers working for or even directing their countries' national authorities, most of the participants interact with aspects of mine/ERW action outside their immediate areas of expertise, which justified and indeed necessitated the ERWTC's comprehensive nature.

The selection process was, therefore, an arduous task for the NCDR's International Relations department. Nominations were solicited from the heads of mine/ERW programs worldwide, after which nominees submitted applications detailing



JMU Professor Steven Harper delivers a lecture during the 2010 ERWTC.

their backgrounds and their reasons for wishing to attend the course. A major challenge in the application process was ensuring that prospective participants were proficient enough in English (the language of instruction) to understand the course material and participate in discussions.

A few qualified applicants were rejected and encouraged to apply again to allow space for other applicants. In some cases, the NCDR accepted more than one applicant from the same country, because the country in question had a particularly severe mine or ERW problem or because multiple independent institutions carried out its program. The NCDR also strove to include as many women as possible. However, despite targeting female applicants, the course included only four female participants out of the 30 participants selected.

Upon arriving in Amman, the ERWTC participants had a very full schedule with lessons taking place five days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., plus occasional working dinners. The tight schedule elicited a few complaints, but participants were also vocally appreciative

of the scope of the course. The first year's participants offered some constructive criticisms that helped the NCDR better prepare its second course held in October 2010. During the month-long training course, the NCDR was pleased to see the participants interacting with each other in and outside of class, sharing long work days and collaborating on challenging assignments. As expected, participants have remained in contact with each other and the NCDR.

#### Second ERWTC

Some of the most challenging work in the ERWTC took place in the weeks and months preceding it, as the course secretariat went through the processes of selecting participants, constructing a schedule, collecting materials from instructors, making travel preparations and arranging accommodations. For the second course, the NCDR hired more staff and began working earlier in the year. A designer developed a logo and an integrated set of designs for ERWTC course materials, and more time was allowed for col-

lecting and compiling materials from the instructors to distribute to the participants.

The selection process was started earlier as well, and the number of female participants in the second course increased. A total of 20 countries and one multinational institution was represented in the second ERWTC.<sup>2</sup>

Having learned from the first training course, the preparation process was easier and more productive the second time around, yet the ERWTC secretariat still found themselves working late into the night as the course's start date approached. The added value of an international program with input from multiple organizations meant the logistical considerations alone took up a great deal of time and energy. Collecting information and materials from instructors was also a challenge, as some instructors travel frequently and were too busy to contact and respond. There was also the inevitable instructor canceling at the last minute, a participant missing a connecting flight, etc.

A key element of the ERWTC's original proposal that was lost in the preparation commotion for the first course was a plan to precede the on-site course with an additional two weeks of training delivered remotely through a Web platform. For the second year, the NCDR solicited suggestions from instructors for materials to be delivered and discussed during the course's online portion, and explored several potential options for e-learning platforms before settling on the simple and no-cost solution of conducting the online training through a Yahoo!® group.

In part, the online training was meant to give the participants an advance about the subject matter during the Jordan training course, as well as to allow instructors to prepare in advance of their lectures. It was also intended as a way for participants to get to know each other before the course. The online training was moderately successful, but attendance and participation proved difficult to enforce, and instructors were not as able to take part in the online discussion as hoped. The group remains online and active, so 2010 ERWTC participants and instructors can continue to use it to keep in touch with one another or to refer back to the course materials, which are posted on the page.

At the time of this writing, the second annual ERWTC recently concluded, and the NCDR is in the process of analyzing participant evaluations and conducting its internal assessment. It is premature to precisely gauge the course's success. However, in measuring the second ERWTC against the first, the course's content and structure are clearly improving, and the project has been an effective exercise in building NCDR staff capacities. Will every participant always fully engage and benefit greatly from the course? No, but the feedback from the 2009 and 2010 participants indicates that all participants gained something from the ERWTC.

#### Conclusion

If the question is whether an international training course for senior mine/ERW managers, held in an affected country with instruc-

tors from many institutions, is worth such an endeavor, the answer is a resounding *yes*. Not only has the ERWTC been rewarding for its trainees, it is also a step forward in the NCDR's transformation into an international leader and center of expertise in mine/ERW action, as well as a successful example of international, multi-institutional cooperation.

NCDR plans to maintain the ERWTC as an annual event, as well as implement other training courses for mine/ERW leaders in the Arab region, in which NCDR staff would play a more central role as instructors. The NCDR seeks to enhance mine/ERW programs so that other countries like Jordan can continue increasing their capacity in effectively managing and mitigating the threats mines and ERW pose to its citizens. ⚡

*see endnotes page 81*



Jonah Shepp is an independent copywriter with an eclectic background as a copywriter, journalist, editor, teacher and playwright. He has worked as a writing, development and public-relations consultant with the NCDR in Jordan since July 2009, and was closely involved in the planning and execution of the first two ERWTCs.

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