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Unsung Hero: Elnur Gasimov

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SpaceToon Kids TV: Educating Kids on ERW

by Daniele Ressler | Mine Action Information Center |

SpaceToon is known to many across the Arab world for its television channel that is geared toward children, SpaceToon Kids TV. This channel is transmit- ted to over 50 million people in the Middle East and North Africa and features cartoons dubbed into Arabic and child-appropriate TV programs. The objectives of SpaceToon Kids TV include being educational, family-friendly and acceptable to Arab culture; promoting positive social values such as tolerance and teamwork; and inspiring creative teamwork; and inspiring creativity. SpaceToon Kids TV include being educational, family-friendly and child-appropriate TV programs. The objectives of SpaceToon Kids TV include being educational, family-friendly and acceptable to Arab culture; promoting positive social values such as tolerance and teamwork; and inspiring creative teamwork; and inspiring creativity.

Among other educational campaigns, the SpaceToon Kids TV Regional Office in Jordan is working to bring a specific kind of message to kids: mines and UXO are dangerous. The Jordan office is the only regional office responsible for developing humanitarian-specific educational programs and campaigns on topics such as democracy, human rights and mine risk education, which can then be broadcast to any or all the Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa through SpaceToon media. Hussam Hadi, Regional Manager, and Rami Allawama, Program Planning Manager, say that due to the dangers the Lebanese and children face these days, they feel a great need to warn them about the dangers of cluster bombs.

The SpaceToon Jordanian office creates humanitar- ianist and educational messages that do- nate and non-governmental organizations want to disseminate. The company staff designs a storyboard and characters who deliver these important messages, such as MRE, to children throughout the Arab region via cartoons, TV documentaries and programs, posters, leaflets, calendars, gifts, activity pads and more. Hadi and Allawama note, “Because the chil- dren in the Arab world need love this channel, its characters and programs, we are able to communicate effectively timely mes- sage to parents and children alike.”

Lebanon faces a post-conflict situa- tion in which the need for MRE is great—especially for children. According to the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre of South Lebanon, children have ac- counted for seven of the 23 fatalities and 49 of the 136 injuries as of November 13, 2006. Cluster submunitions can be particularly dangerous because some may resemble toys due to their small size and colorful ribbon. Children playing may find these curious items and touch them, which can detonate the unexploded ordnance.

SpaceToon Kids TV recognizes the need in Lebanon for MRE for children. Hadi and Allawama say that at the Regional Office in Jordan, “we have a full package campaign designed especially for Lebanese children including TV spots, posters, flyers, activi- ty books and notebooks.” The company is looking for donors who are interested in dis- tributing their educational materials, which are designed to provide MRE in Arabic us- ing child-friendly and culturally sensitive techniques with cartoon characters and popular programming.

SpaceToon’s Regional Office has experi- ence providing MRE and awareness-raising campaigns about the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war through its popular MRE in the Arab world watch and love this channel, its characters and programs, we are able to communicate effectively timely messages to parents and children alike.”

Conclusion
With the help of new donor sponsors, SpaceToon’s Regional Office in Jordan plans to address the urgent need of ensuring chil- dren’s safety in Lebanon, as well as continue to deliver MRE activities in Iraq where chil- dren are also at great risk. See Endnotes, page 111

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As a young man in a war-torn area of Azerbaijan, Elnur Gasimov experienced the shock of being severely injured by a piece of unexploded ordnance. Today, Gasimov’s personal experience has inspired him to work as the Team Leader of the Training and Quality Assurance Team at the Afghan Mine Action in Herat, Afghanistan, where he was injured. A young man with a metal object along the road taught him to love. Unbeknownst to Gasimov at the time, it was the start of an unfulfilled hand grenade. “Some areas were occupied by Armenian forces and there were a lot of military munitions spread around. At that time, there was no mine- risk education in Azerbaijan,” Gasimov recalls. This lack of MRE proved to be very dangerous for the young Gasimov. When he tried to touch the unknown object, it exploded, causing him to lose three fingers on his right hand. After receiving treatment in a local military hospital for about one month, Gasimov was able to return to school and finish his education. Seven years after the incident, Gasimov made the decision to pursue a career in mine action. “One day I got an encouraging opportu- nity to join the humanitarian mine action movement. I started working with a national NGO [nongovernmental organization] and eventually with ANAMA.”

In 2000 after graduating from university, Gasimov began working as a surveyor for the International Eurasia Pruf Fund—an NGO work- ing under the ANAMA umbrella. Gasimov briefly explained his work at the IEPF. “One year after training, I worked as a surveyor around the border collecting information from villages about contaminated land and mine victims.” After a year with the IEPF, Gasimov went to work with ANAMA as an instructor in humanitarian mines-mapping with the monitoring and training team. As part of his work as an instructor,
Gasimov taught mine-risk education to schoolchildren in affected areas of Azerbaijan. "I used to go to schools conducting mine-risk education in order to prevent incidents such as my own," he remembers.

Gasimov's commitment to his work in mine action helped him receive the promotion to Team Leader of the Training and Quality Assurance Team at ANAMA, an important component of the mine-action program in Azerbaijan. The T&QA Team at ANAMA was created specifically to oversee the effective operation of the demining companies and to identify and address any problems that arise during the de-mining process.

As part of his training in the T&QA Team at ANAMA, Gasimov attended a number of courses in mine action. He provides the following description of the main functions of his team: "We conduct trainings, work on capacity building, conduct monitoring and evaluation systems, and participate in the development of national and international mine-risk education standards." He adds, "We make sure that nothing remains and there is no ordinance missed."

Gasimov recognizes mine clearance is an ongoing process. "Once you have identified the minefield, you then have to detect and then de-mine the area. We have our own field manual that says you should not walk in the minefield, although I have walked through minefields," he explains. "We have done it in order to understand the environment and the situation." Gasimov is happy to dedicate his life's work to the destruction of devices that are so harmful. "Each destroyed mine and each de-mined piece of ordinance means someone's destroyed life or protected life."

In spite of the difficulties that accompany working in minefields, Gasimov feels his work is mine wages have increased. He hopes one day all countries, including his own, will be free from the complications indicated by mines and UXO. "The young T&QA Team Leaders would like to use the injury and death caused by mines and UXO as a lesson. We want to inform people that they are surrounded by landmines."

Gasimov states, "It is very hard." When asked about his suggestions for the mine-action community, Gasimov believes communication is essential to solving the mine problem. "Our suggestion is to work closer together, to share the expertise and the experience, and to work as a team against the problem. We can share knowledge that we have learned so that others do not have to learn from their own mistakes," he concludes.

It is Gasimov's sense of hope, compassion, and unity that makes him a valuable member of the team. "It is very hard. It is Gasimov's hope that makes him a valuable member of the team. He not only contributes his knowledge and dedication to the field, but he also has taught mine victims that recovery from tragic situations is well within reach."


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In addition to having mined sports along as border with Ecuador resulting from a conflict resolved long ago, Peru currently faces, primarily on civilian landmine accidents in the areas surrounding the towers of the power-transmission lines that cross the country. In the mid-1980s, guerrillas of Sendero Luminoso group launched a strategy to knock down towers with high-tension lines to cause blackouts in several regions, including the capital, Lima. In 1986, in one day—the day before elections—10 towers were knocked down, resulting in a nationwide blackout.

After this incident, authorities decided it was urgent to protect their power-transmission infrastructure. However, it was not feasible to keep guards around every tower, many of which were located deep in the jungle, in inhospitable areas at high altitudes. The solution was to employ landmines quickly around these towers, but as with every plan created in haste, many mistakes with fatal consequences resulted.

Charged with the task of eradicating the landmines, the National Police developed an "explosive device for self-protection," which was basically an adapted army grenade, equipped with a system of precise detonation and assembled in the very area where it was placed. Essentially, the device was nothing more than an improvised landmine. Later, the country's Navy would develop a mine of its own. It was smaller and more powerful, but a little safer in its functioning.

In 1989, a group of 60 police officers was assigned to plant 30 to 50 landmines around each of the 1,711 towers located at strategic spots in the departments of Lima, Junín, Huaraz, and Ica. Of those 60 professionals, only 23 had had any kind of training and qualification in explosives, and they transferred their knowledge to the others. Worse still, each time one of the towers needed technical maintenance, those professionals were sent abroad to "operate as a team," disarming and removing the landmines from a strip of land where they would be replaced and deactivated later. They had no personal protective equipment and no plan for transportation and rescue if required.

There were no suitable maps of mine locations either, since many of them had to be planted quickly in areas with clumps of over 5,000 meters (16,404 feet) due to the physiological threats posed by high altitudes, or were influenced to possible displacements caused by rain, floods, landslides, vegetation growth, etc.

The lack of proper training and qualifications, personal safety equipment and accurate maps, in addition to the quality of landmines themselves and the