Impact of Mines and UXO

...Seventy percent of the previously nomadic population has become urbanised, a consequence of which is urban expansion into the areas of defensive mine belts. Many of these nomads still follow pastoral practices, which has resulted in mine accidents involving people and valuable livestock, particularly camels. Northern Mauritania is known as the last place to raise camels, so it attracts all the nomadic populations in the region. Finding landmines does not make people in these areas want to move, because they have heard stories that other regions are likely to bring sickness to their camels, resulting in poverty. The key economic activities of metal ore extraction and fishing are also affected by the presence of mines.

Mauritania is developing as a tourist destination and has seen a revitalisation in the last few years; however, mines present a significant threat in the desert areas populated by nomads. According to the Zouerat Regional Hospital, a national network of NGOs and the military in charge of evacuating the last mine accident in northern Mauritania killed one Mauritanian and injured two Qarant refugees, and it illustrates the potential impact mines have on tourism.

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Mauritania has adopted standard operating procedures for humanitarian mine clearance. These standards have improved the safety and efficiency of the clearance itself, but rigid adherence to foreign standards has drastically reduced the clearance results. After the Onfala Operation, the BNDH approached many donors in order to raise funds for implementing all the demine projects. The results that have been achieved since the introduction of the 1998 International Mine Action Standards are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Mauritanian mines/UXO clearance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route clear and opened</th>
<th>Areas cleared</th>
<th>Mines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002 kilometres (126 miles)</td>
<td>6,760,000 square metres (2,606,190 square miles) with quality control</td>
<td>Over 2,300 items</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusions**

Mauritania can be free of landmines in a short time with a little support from the UNDP and the international community. With this much-needed support, it should be possible for Mauritania to meet its completion deadline, as discussed in a new report. The report was prepared in response to a request from Mauritania’s Ministry of Justice, Parliament and the National Committee for Humanitarian Demining. A dedicated entity within the Mauritania military engineers, is responsible for all mine-related activities in the country. This national agency is the only demining capacity in the country, conducting both mine/UXO clearance and mine-awareness activities with partners. The National Committee includes ministers involved in the mine-action issue—Defence, Foreign Affairs, Interior and Justice, Parliament and nongovernmental organisations. This committee is responsible for establishing the work plan for the National Demining Office, including national priorities, and giving an annual report on the implemented tasks to the BNDH and national government.

Mauritanian National Capacity

- 120 deminers (195 by mid-2006)
- 12 demining instructors
- 6 mine-awareness instructors
- Specific equipment for clearance (detectors, vehicles, etc.)
- With support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the BNDH has installed the Information Management System for Mine Action databases.

**Challenges**

Shifting dunes. Many landmines are known to be covered by dunes in the desert and sometimes close to urban areas like Nouakchott. As a result, it is very difficult to have an accurate database. The dunes are constantly moving; one day the mines are visible and the following day the dunes cover them to a point deeper than normal for buried mines. This presents a challenge in clearance because mine detectors may not work to these depths. Mauritania is approaching other programmes and specialised institutes, for example the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, to learn how to best handle this situation.

Friendraising. To date, the main funding source for Mauritanian mine action is the Mauritanian government. The Mauritanian programme for mine action has had difficulty getting financial support from the international community because it lacks the resources to effectively sell the programme needs and the progress that is being made. To combat this problem, Mauritania has obtained the assistance of a Senior Technical Advisor from the United Nations Development Programme and has developed a clear strategy and transparency in mine action.

**Conclusion**

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