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Libya

by Wendy Waldeck

[Mine Action Information Center]

Libya is one of the world's largest socialist republics and has been ruled by many different foreign powers. Libya's official name is the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. During the Turk-Italian War of 1911, there was a constant battle between the Libyans and the Italians until the Italians seized the country in 1939.¹ It was also the major battleground in northern Africa when Italy entered World War II, which left many landmines scattered throughout Libya. Landmines were also emplaced along the border during the conflict with Egypt in 1977 and again in 1980–87 when Libya entered a conflict with Chad.²

Landmine Situation

Libya has a significant landmine problem that raises petroleum exploration costs and affects the development of grazing and industrial projects. One such industrial project was the construction of the Great Man-Made River, which is a 3,380-kilometer (2,100-mile) network of pipes that transports water to the northern and southern regions. The Great Man-Made River was affected by the presence of landmines, whose removal significantly increased the construction cost for the project. In 1977, the Libyan Army emplaced two million landmines and in 2003, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that there were approximately 1.5 to three million landmines in the ground.³ In June 2005, Libya asked all the countries that had emplaced landmines in its territory to hand over maps of the minefields. Italy provided maps to Libya showing where the landmines were placed during World War II. Although there are landmine maps of the conflict along the borders of Libya and Egypt, there are no recorded maps for the mines along the Chadian border.

Landmine Casualties and Survivor Assistance

The Libyan government does not have a mechanism to collect data on landmine casualties; thus, exact figures are not known. The compiled report from the Libyan police states there were 11,845 landmine casualties and between 1940 and 1995, 6,749 people were killed and 5,096 were injured.³ Another

source, the Libyan Jihad Center for Historical Studies, claims that between 1952 and 1975, 12,258 mine casualties occurred, including 3,874 people killed and 8,384 injured.³

Libya offers survivor assistance in the capital, Tripoli, and in Benghazi, the second largest Libyan city. Located in northeast Libya, Benghazi has a hospital with general medical services and surgery. However, there has been no recent survey of facilities in rural areas, which are likely to be scattered. Companies looking to establish themselves will inevitably need to develop their own remote site facilities and staff health programs.⁴ Physical rehabilitation services and psychosocial assistance for mine/unexploded ordnance survivors in Libya are also insufficient.³

The Ottawa Convention

At a seminar held in Tripoli May 12, 2005, Engineer Seif al-Islam Gaddafi asked his country to join the Ottawa Convention⁵ and to set a timeframe to remove the mines from the Libyan borders with Egypt and Chad. Most countries are encouraging Libya to sign the Convention, which will increase funding assistance for Libya to remove the mines. However, some people like Dr. Mohamed Taher Sialla, Secretary for Cooperation Affairs and chairman of the National Program to Remove Landmines and Rehabilitate Land, believe the Convention will not tackle the mine problem and will not require responsibility for those who laid the mines.²

Seventy-five percent of the world's countries have joined the Ottawa Convention.² If Libya joins the Convention, it would be accountable for its landmine removal and it would also have lawful authority to ask for assistance not only from countries that laid mines during WWII, but from all 144 signatories of the Convention.² Some of Libya's neighboring countries, such as Algeria, Chad and Sudan, have already signed the Convention, which gives Libya additional incentives to sign it.²

Mine Clearance

In 2002, Libya failed to meet Italy's deadline to provide information on how 2.5 million Euros⁶ should be spent on mine

clearance; therefore, the funding was given to other countries. The Anti-Mines Association was established in 2005 and, as of May 2005, had not yet conducted mine-clearance operations. Libya says that from the end of World War II to 1981, it cleared 14.5 million landmines.³ The Civil Protection and the Engineering Corps of the Libyan Army conduct some mine clearance every year, but this demining is not made public.³

Conclusion

Signing the Ottawa Convention would be a step towards getting Libya's landmines cleared quicker with the help of other signatories. In addition to Libya's mine-action efforts, there is hope for the country. Libya has made efforts to improve relations with members of the international community. And although Libya remains a socialist republic, at the time of this writing, the United States was expected to remove the country from its list of designated state sponsors of terrorism by the end of June 2006. Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi has even recently opened Libya's industry to Western investment. Hopefully, these recent events have set Libya on a course to regaining acceptance in the international community and will lead to further aid in its mine-action efforts. ♦

To view endnotes and references for this article, visit <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/10.1/profiles/libya/libya.htm/#endnotes>.



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