Geneva Diary:

Report from the GICHD

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining provides operational assistance to mine-action programmes and operators, creates and disseminates knowledge, works to improve quality management and standards, and provides support to instruments of international law like the Ottawa Convention1 and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.2

by Ian Mansfield | Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining |

Over the past 15 years, mine action has evolved into an established component of the relief and development sector. During this period, programmes and projects for demining, mine-risk education, victim assistance, advocacy and stockpile destruction have been discussed, refined and improved by operators, programme managers, diplomats and activists. As part of its ongoing role to reinforce the effectiveness and efficiency of mine action, the GICHD commissioned contributions from development and mine-action experts on the many lessons that have been learned over the past 15 years and the challenges that remain to be met. These have been brought together in a book titled Mine Action: Lessons and Challenges.

Following an executive summary of its main conclusions and findings, the work is laid out in two parts. Part I looks at the core activities—"the pillars"—of mine action: advocacy, victim assistance, mine-risk education, demining and stockpile destruction. Part II looks at key management issues, specifically programme coordination and management, information management and capacity development. This work concludes with a thought-provoking assessment of what mine action has actually achieved. The book was published in November 2005 and can be ordered via the GICHD Web site.

IMAS Mine-risk Education: ‘Best Practice’ Handbooks

The seven mine-risk education components of the International Mine Action Standards outline minimum standards for the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of MRE programmes and projects. The IMAS are large, prescriptive, advising national authorities, operators and donors on what is necessary for the development and implementation of effective MRE programmes. However, they do not guide stakeholders on how they might adapt their programmes to be more compliant with the standards.

To facilitate the implementation of the MRE standards in the field, UNICEF re-engineered the GICHD develop a series of "best practice" guidebooks to provide more practical advice on how to implement the MRE standards. A total of 12 guidebooks have been developed using a variety of people, countries and contexts. The guidebooks address a wide range of areas covered by the MRE IMAS, including:

• How to support the coordination and the dissemination of public information
• How to implement risk education and training projects
• How to undertake community mine-action fusion
• What elements should be considered to implement effective MRE projects in emergencies

Copies of the guidebooks are available by contacting GICHD or UNICEF, or online at www.mineactionstandards.org.

Ongoing Work at the GICHD

The GICHD is undertaking a major study, Land Release and Risk-Management Approaches, which aims to examine the various processes used to release land (other than by full clearance) and to advise on ways in which a risk-management approach can be applied to speed up this process. The study will be completed by the end of 2006. The development of the International Mine Action Standards has been undertaken by the GICHD on behalf of United Nations Mine Action Service. There are currently 38 existing IMAS and another 10 are in the final approval stage of the process. The latest IMAS are always posted on the Standards’ Web site (www.mineactionstandards.org) and the GICHD produces an updated CD each year. A revised, simple Guide to IMAS was published in early 2006.

Minefield as a School Ground:

The Tzur Baher Minefield Clearance Project

With so many factors limiting the education process in the Middle East, it is hard to believe that one more could be imposed upon the people of Tzur Baher, a village in Jerusalem. However, the presence of a minefield in their village severely hindered progress in the building of a school. Maavir Civil Engineering Ltd. was brought in to begin work. The planned site for the school is now mine-free, and construction is scheduled to start in the near future.

When you think about building a high school, the last word that probably comes to mind is minefield, but that’s exactly what the people of Tzur Baher considered. Clearing a minefield and returning it to civilian use is always important. When the purpose is to allow youth to obtain an education, this significance has added benefits.

Tzur Baher, a small Palestinian village on the eastern outskirts of Jerusalem where 15,000 residents live with only one general school for about 4,000 village children. Due to the lack of a public high school, those who do not find schools outside of the village get at most 10 years of basic education.

The community decided to build a new school, but available land was scarce. Most potential building sites in the village were in use for private housing, and the only public land under municipal control was the minefield in the western outskirts of the village, where the Jordanian Army emplaced mines before the 1967 War.

In 2000, the Israeli government and Jerusalem municipality approved a new public housing program that included building two new high schools and a public youth center. The building program resulted from an Israeli Supreme Court ruling that forced the authorities to build schools for the villagers. The decision regarding who would do the clearance and who would fund the clearance of the minefield caused a disagreement between the army and the municipality; each side placed the responsibility with the other. The Israeli Defense Force claimed it was responsible for clearing minefields only when the clearing was a military necessity. Additionally, the IDF insisted that since the land is located on a Jordanian minefield, it was not the IDF’s responsibility to clear it. The municipality, on the other hand, argued the IDF has the professional and public responsibility to clear the field since the municipality has no expertise in mine clearance.

The government’s legal counsel made the final decision: Israel’s Ministry of Justice decided it was the municipality’s responsibility to do the work and ordered it to engage a civilian mine-clearance company to complete the project. The Ministry of Justice found that although the IDF was not responsible for emplacing the field, it was, nevertheless, responsible for verifying the professional quality of the clearance work. The court consequently ordered the IDF to give the

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