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The Landmines Resource Center for Lebanon

After 15 years of war and 22 years of occupation, Lebanon is littered with landmines. The Landmines Resource Center (LMRC) seeks to improve the situation by collecting, analyzing and disseminating related data.

by **Habbouba Aoun, University of Balamand**

The Landmines Resource Center for Lebanon was established in 1997 at the Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Balamand. Since 1998, its operations expanded with the help of a grant made available through the World Rehabilitation Fund and the United States Agency for International Development.

The Landmines Resource Center in Lebanon (LMRC) aims at a lasting improvement in the lives of those affected by mines. It advocates prevention, rehabilitation and social reintegration in the context of a comprehensive concept of reconstruction and development. Valuable and important technical interventions such as mine clearance and the provision of prosthetics are provided; however, rebuilding the lives of survivors and of families of those killed by landmines and unexploded ordnance and developing affected societies has to consider the necessity of readjusting the relationship between the individual and the social/cultural and physical environment in order to provide a qualitative and sustainable improvement in living conditions, a prerequisite to sustainable development.

The LMRC works on local capacity building, needs assessment, data gathering and analysis, and dissemination of information, including what relates to international charters and humanitarian laws, mine awareness and victim assistance. In

addition, it is actively involved in providing and mobilizing support to the demining and mine action initiatives by the National Demining Office of the Lebanese Army.

The Landmines Resource Center in Lebanon works very closely with:

- Communities and individuals, particularly youngsters and farmers, living in, or concerned with, dangerous areas, minefields or other mine and UXO affected areas:
- Youth (students and scouts)
- Policy and decision-makers in the public and private sectors
- Concerned governmental bodies and non-governmental and community based organizations
- Academic institutions and schools, concerned professionals, practitioners and volunteers
- Survivors (victims) of landmines in Lebanon and their families

LMRC is achieving an incremental (close to comprehensive) understanding of the landmine problem in Lebanon based on scientific national surveys and partnership with concerned counterparts and stakeholders. A 1998—1999 nationwide door-to-door survey of landmine victims in Lebanon and a complementary survey (July 2000) assessing the landmine problem and related burden in the liberated South and West Bekaa permitted solid foundations to such understanding. Benefiting from lessons learned and experiences gained in mine affected countries, the LMRC has been able to contribute to and be proactive in

well-structured mine awareness in Lebanon and to provide a strategy for the role of the victims' rehabilitation teams according to varying regional needs and resources. The LMRC has also conducted a series of workshops aimed at building local capacity to analyze and communicate needs and at empowering local communities to become active partners in planning and implementing mine action programs and activities at the country and national levels.

Networking with concerned others at national and international levels has led the Center to be an essential reference for a large number of nationals and internationals, including UN agencies concerned with the landmine problem in Lebanon and the Arab Countries. The Landmines Resource Center is gaining and expanding acceptance and status as a vital entity for the country. Its solid partnership with the community and the Lebanese Army (the National Demining Office) and its mine action strategy has resulted in high organizational performances.

The Landmine Problem in Lebanon

The landmine problem in Lebanon is the result of fifteen years of war (1975—1990) and twenty-two years of occupation (1978—2000). Estimates of the number of landmines, UXO and cluster bombs vary. Until May 2000, the total number of landmines in the country was thought to be 150,000, excluding those in the

Mine Action in Lebanon Facts Sheet

- Unstructured mine action in Lebanon started in 1996 as a local effort initiated and supported by the World Rehabilitation Fund in partnership with the Ministry of Health and local non-governmental organizations.
- In 1998, the Lebanese government established the National Demining Office at the Lebanese Army (Government decision: April 29, 1998).
- In 1998, the World Rehabilitation Fund (WRF) launched its landmine project covering four pillars of Mine Action: Mine Action Information, Mine Awareness, Victims' Assistance, and Support to Mine Clearance Initiatives of the Lebanese Army.
- Since the beginning of the WRF project, non-governmental organizations and the Landmines Resource Center at the University of Balamand coordinated very well mine related activities in the country in collaboration with the National Demining Office of the Lebanese Army.
- LMRC established a dynamic victims' database that includes detailed information about the landmine victims all over the country and a database about the landmine problem in the South and West Bekaa that includes detailed information about the 196 most severely mine-affected villages in the liberated areas of the South and West Bekaa.
- Surveys conducted by the LMRC showed that:
 - o There are 2758 landmine victims in Lebanon including 1168 deaths and 1590 survivors.
 - o There are 1375 landmine victims in the South and Nabatieh including 720 deaths and 655 survivors.
 - o Fifty percent of the landmine survivors in Lebanon were amputated, seven percent were paralyzed, 18 percent suffered from major injuries in the head and other parts of the body, 18 percent suffered from minor injuries and 7 percent had burns and other injuries.
 - o Fifty-six percent of the landmine survivors in Lebanon were injured by a landmine, 37 percent were injured by unexploded ordnance or cluster bomb and seven percent have touched a strange object.
 - o Forty-one percent of the landmine survivors in Lebanon were injured while engaged in their daily agricultural activities, 40 percent reported to be injured while crossing demarcation lines or during wartime. Nineteen percent were injured while engaged in recreational activities.
 - o The average age of the landmine survivors in Lebanon was 35 years where the majority of the interviewed survivors belonged to the age group (30-40).
 - o The majority of the landmine survivors in Lebanon were males (90 percent), 63 percent of them were married and were responsible for at least four dependents.
 - o Fifty-seven percent of the landmine survivors in Lebanon were working. The average monthly family income of 56 percent of the survivors is less than 300 US Dollars.
 - o Thirty-one percent of the landmine survivors in Lebanon were illiterate or could barely read and write. Twenty-seven percent of them had reached the elementary level of education.
 - o One hundred and ninety-six villages in the South and West Bekaa were found to be mine affected. Thirty-seven percent of those villages had access to safe water, eight percent had accessible roads, 51 percent had educational facilities, and 38 percent had at least one health care facility.
 - o War and landmines led to a noticed decrease in agricultural production: the decrease in olive and olive oil production was 50 percent, in fruit trees was 78 percent, in protected agriculture was 94 percent and in field agriculture was 80 percent.
 - o There are 1388 identified mined areas in Lebanon, of which 1019 are still not cleared.
- Mine awareness education was launched all over the country and mine awareness material were produced (posters, booklets, leaflets, songs,...)
- Local capacity building started in many areas including the North, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa and the South.
- In May 2000, the liberation of the South and West Bekaa took place.
- Starting May 2000, UNICEF became involved in mine action providing support to awareness and related community activities in South Lebanon and West Bekaa.
- Starting June 2000, other UN agencies intervened: UNMAS and UNIFIL established a mine-action-coordination-cell (MACC) in the South; MACC started operating the IMSMA. UNDP assigned a mine advisor to the National Demining office of the Lebanese Army. UNESCO supported some mine awareness activities in the public schools of the liberated South.
- Between May 2000 and May 2001, the demand of communities for mine action increased. Response was limited by scarce funds.
- Between May 2000 and May 2001, many missions and representatives of donor countries visited Lebanon. Donations towards providing the Lebanese Army with necessary demining equipments were made. However, needs in training and equipment are still not met.
- Starting August 2000, Swedish Save the Children started a child-to-child project on mine awareness in Bint Jbeil.
- Starting December 2000, the Mine Advisory Group (MAG) launched a demining project in Nabatieh area. The project was suspended in August 2001.
- A "Level One Impact Survey of Lebanon" sponsored by EU is planned to start before the end of 2001.
- Starting January 2001, the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) started a victims' assistance program in South and West Bekaa.
- Between May 2000 and May 2001, the National Demining Office of the Lebanese Army and the non-governmental and community-based organizations were trying to plan and implement mine awareness interventions.
- Starting January 2001, local actors in Mine Action including non-governmental and community-based organizations are lacking funds and important programs are frozen.
- The World Rehabilitation Fund is starting an income-generating program to landmine victims in Jezzine, South Lebanon.

occupied zone¹. However, after the liberation, the UN estimated that the liberated areas in the South and West Bekaa on their own contained 130,000 landmines and UXO within an area of 850 square kilometers². Israel has admitted planting 70,000 landmines and 288 booby-trapped devices; Those are believed to be distributed over 188 mine fields and spread among the villages of the border from Ras Naqoura on the coast to opposite Shebaa in the Mount Hermon foothills³.

In a survey conducted in July 2000, the LMRC has identified 429 dangerous areas reported by local communities in 196 villages. Parallel to this, the Lebanese Army has reported about 580 dangerous areas in Cazas of Nabatieh, Tyre, Jezzine, Saida, Hasbayya, Bint Jbeil, Marjeyoun and West Bekaa. Recurrent injuries confirm the spread of large numbers of dangerous areas in agricultural lands, pedestrian pathways and backyards. The total number of landmine victims in Lebanon so far is 2758 (1168 deaths), of which 166 (17 killed) have occurred between May 23, 2000 and October 10, 2001.

The socio-economic impact of the landmine problem in Lebanon, and specifically in the South and West Bekaa, is huge. Landmines, cluster bombs, UXO and booby-traps are mainly planted in agricultural areas where agriculture used to be the major source of income for villagers. War, occupation and landmines have decreased opportunities for normal life in the South and increased the exodus of the population. Less than 26 percent of the indigenous population resided in the South during the occupation⁴. Seven percent tried to return and settle after the Liberation but almost all of them have returned to their displacement place of residence at the end of the summer of year 2000⁵. Access to health services, secondary levels of schooling and job opportunities are scarce⁶. The infrastructure has been almost

completely demolished⁷. The LMRC Survey of the Landmine Problem in the Liberated South and West Bekaa showed a noticed decrease in agricultural production due to landmines. The unavailability of appropriate and affordable rehabilitation services has been increasing the burden of the landmine problem on affected families.

There are many needs, of which mine clearance is one of the priorities. The valuable and important demining initiatives of the Lebanese Army are appreciated but are not enough so far. UNIFIL operations in mine clearance are military and not humanitarian⁸. Marking and fencing of dangerous areas is very limited and almost non-existent in many areas. Local communities suffer from long administrative procedures that hinder their call for and receipt of immediate help; this situation promotes feelings of despair and hopelessness among those who want to cultivate their land and receive compensation for not being able to use their mined agricultural lands⁹. Families with landmine victims and landmine survivors suffer more due to the need for medical treatment, rehabilitation services, job opportunities and social assistance, all of which are very scarce or not affordable.

Mine awareness education continues to be limited by scarce funds. The World Rehabilitation Fund and the United States Agency for International Development were the first contributors to Mine Action in Lebanon¹⁰. After the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, many other donor countries pledged in-kind and monetary support in favor of mine action in general, and mine clearance operations in particular, in the South. Other than the US, these include Australia, Britain, Canada, European Union, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Pakistan and Ukraine. About 200 Syrian soldiers, fully equipped, are involved in demining activities with

the Lebanese Army. On May 21, 2001, the United Arab Emirates formally announced a \$50 million (U.S.) donation to demine South Lebanon. A memorandum of understanding is being developed between the Lebanese and Emirates governments in order to facilitate effective implementation of respective mine action activities. Real work on the ground is expected to start by the end of October 2001. ■

Endnotes

- ¹ Landmine Monitor Report, 1999.
- ² Declaration of the UNIFIL-Ukrainian Contingent to France Press on July 19, 2000.
- ³ Interview of the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Cell in Naqoura with the Daily Star newspaper (Reporter: Nicholas Blandford) on January 18, 2001.
- ⁴ UNDP study of the South, 1999.
- ⁵ March 14 and April 18 Committee of the Lebanese Council of Deputies, March 14, 2001.
- ⁶ March 14 and April 18 Committee of the Lebanese Council of Deputies, March 14, 2001.
- ⁷ March 14 and April 18 Committee of the Lebanese Council of Deputies, March 14, 2001.
- ⁸ Interview of the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Cell in Naqoura with the Daily Star newspaper (Reporter: Nicholas Blandford) on January 18, 2001.
- ⁹ Community meetings in Houla-Bint Jbeil, Ibl Essaqi- Marjeyou, Kfartebnit-Nabatieh, April 11, 2001.
- ¹⁰ In 1998, USAID was the first donor agency to initiate a program on landmines in Lebanon, at the governmental and non-governmental levels.

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¹ Landmine Monitor Report, 1999.

² Declaration of the UNIFIL-Ukrainian Contingent to France Press on July 19, 2000.

³ Interview of the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Cell in Naqoura with the Daily Star newspaper (Reporter: Nicholas Blandford) on January 18, 2001.

⁴ UNDP study of the South, 1999.

⁵ March 14 and April 18 Committee of the Lebanese Council of Deputies, March 14, 2001.

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