

# Mine Action in Egypt: The Landmine Struggle Center and Arabic Mine Action Campaign

Egypt's land is plagued with almost 20 million mines/UXO dating back to WWII. The government does not want to remove them without help from those who planted them. The Landmine Struggle Center and Arabic Mine Action Campaign were formed to help those who are affected.

by Jenny Lange, MAIC

## Striving For Help

Egypt's allocation for funds for demining are limited and are not sufficient when looking at the scope of the problem of landmines/UXO in the country. In February 2000, Egypt announced that mine clearance had stopped due to a shortage of funds. But in June 2000, the Landmine Struggle Center, a national NGO, monitored a continuation of mine clearance conducted by the army in areas of the Western Desert for agricultural purposes. Commercial companies near oil and other resources also continued demining in 2000.

Egypt would like to receive help from the countries that are responsible for planting the mines. Egypt's Assistant Foreign Minister, Sayed el-Masri, says, "It's a very difficult thing. We cannot do it alone. We need the help of advanced technology to detect these unexploded mines and we think there's a moral and legal responsibility upon the states who planted them." Britain, Germany and Italy have designated money towards mine clearance, as well as old maps to help identify mine fields. For information on how the U.S. is helping Egypt, see "Humanitarian Demining in Egypt" by Timothy Kennedy on page 56.

## Landmine Struggle Center

### Background

The Landmine Struggle Center (LSC) was established December 3, 1997. The LSC is an NGO that formed because the government lacked organizations that worked with landmines in the areas of mine awareness, mine clearance and victim assistance. According to the LSC website, the following are reasons why the LSC was formed:

- Landmines are obstacles in the economic development in the north and east coast of Egypt due to the loss of agricultural land.

- In the last 20 years, Egypt has lost 3,200 people due to AP mines and 4,723 people have been handicapped.
- No clear, accurate maps are available for landmine removal, and natural forces have caused the removal of known mines to be difficult, sometimes impossible.
- No specialized first aid center has been formed to help landmine victims.
- Vocational training programs for victims are not available.
- No essential information about landmines is provided to inhabitants of mine-infested areas.

■ A member of the Al-Hawashla family carries two jugs of freshly squeezed camel milk as morning breaks in the Bedouin village. c/o AP



- No legal mechanism for helping the victims to receive legal rights has been established.
- Egypt is not in any international programs that aid countries suffering from the problem.

Four programs have been introduced into the country by the LSC, namely the Geographical Survey Program, Mine Awareness Program, Victim Assistance Program and Mine Clearance Program.

### *Geographical Survey Program*

The Geographical Survey Program aims to accurately determine the areas of mine fields in order to produce detailed maps of mine-infested areas in Egypt and assess their danger. The program formulates statistics covering the number of casualties and their families, details of the incidents, and any needs of the victims. These needs are then considered by the LSC to be filled if at all possible to help make the tragedy easier to cope with. Details about the accident that are recorded include information about the victim, previous casualties in the area, any nearby mine fields, and nearby hospitals. The records made personally by the LSC about victims of landmines help monitor the degree of danger in areas with landmines.

In 1999, the LSC recorded 57 victims. In 2000, 34 victims were recorded, and up to September of 2001, 12 victims have been recorded. Victims do go unreported, yet Mr. Ayman Sorour, Executive Director of the Landmine Struggle Center, says the number of unreported victims should not be more than 10 to 15 per year.

### *Mine Awareness Program*

Many Egyptians are unaware of the landmine problem in their country. The LSC formed the Mine Awareness Program in order to inform civilians about all aspects of landmines. The program created many goals in order to help spread mine

awareness throughout Egypt. These goals include establishing a database about the problem of landmines in Egypt, publishing reports, newsletters and booklets about the problem of landmines and the efforts done to eliminate the danger, providing the media with the appropriate information, graphics and statistics in order to motivate them to focus attention on the landmine problem, setting mine awareness signs around mined areas, and providing workshops for citizens of Egypt about mine awareness.

During 1999 and 2000, 20 mine awareness workshops were held in El Alamein, the site of a gruesome battle during WWII. These workshops were deemed unsuccessful because of the amount of people who attended them. Of the 10,000 citizens of El Alamein, only 10 to 15 people attended each workshop. The director of the LSC believes that communication is the main problem in getting people to attend these workshops. Many people are unable to read or write, especially among the Bedouin society. In the Bedouin society, members only trust each other; they have certain customs and rules that they follow that are hard to break into as an outsider. Those who try to inform the Bedouins about mine awareness workshops are unsuccessful because communicating among their group is very difficult. The LSC would like to study communication among the Bedouin culture in order to learn how to successfully inform them about the issues of landmines.

### *Victim Assistance Program*

The Victim Assistance Program was formed to directly help victims of landmine incidents. The goals of this program are to improve the health services of landmine victims, help handicapped victims adjust to new conditions, develop convenient first aid for victims and participate in establishing well-equipped emergency sections in hospitals specifically for

landmine victims.

One thing the LSC has realized is that victims are not in need of psychological help; instead they would rather see the center help them with receiving artificial limbs. Therefore the center has set up trust funds for landmine victims. The trust fund directly helps victims by providing them with artificial limbs. The victims receive direct transfer to centers that fit them with the appropriate prosthetic limb. Last year, three victims received limbs.

### *Mine Clearance Program*

The Mine Clearance Program was designed to determine landmine areas and necessary efforts in clearing these areas, to use modern technology in clearing mines from Egyptian lands and to cooperate with local efforts in clearance programs. Unfortunately, this program has ended due to lack of funds. Prior to the LSC, humanitarian demining in Egypt did not exist, and it was hard to expect a program to start. The LSC did all it could to start a program, yet funds were limited. Only the military clears mines in Egypt, and they will only clear for two reasons: military reasons or developmental reasons. The military funds their own projects, and the developmental projects are funded through the project itself. Because of the limited clearing efforts, landmines will remain in many areas. The LSC tried to combat this issue, yet the lack of funds forced it to stop.

### **Arabic Mine Action Campaign**

The Arabic Mine Action Campaign (AMAC) was established in December of 1998 through a proposal by Ayman Sorour, Executive Director of the LSC. At the Human Rights Defender Summit, the AMAC was proposed to all the Arabic NGOs in order to raise mine awareness and mine clearance throughout many

*continued on page 68*

## ***Landmines in Egypt*** (continued from p. 30)

Arabic countries. The LSC is the coordinator of the campaign. Countries with NGOs representing them in the campaign are Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Djibouti, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. Together, these countries contain almost 60 million mines/UXO.

Mine awareness and mine clearance is necessary among these countries so they can solve the landmine problem together. Because the current mine/UXO situation is difficult for governments to deal with, the AMAC has agreed to exchange and discuss information on a variety of topics including information about victims, how to help raise mine awareness and mine clearance among each other, and how to research the

financial capacity of other countries to help members of the AMAC. At the national level, the AMAC invited all Arab countries affected by the mine/UXO problem to develop demining and mine awareness programs, as well as to assist victims. AMAC also requested that the Arabic countries with the financial capacity to support both governmental and NGO mine action programs in the Arab countries affected by the Landmine/UXOs. So far, the AMAC has been successful in raising awareness among each other and other countries. Saudi Arabia donated \$300 million to Yemen for mine clearance, and the United Arab Emirates donated \$50 million to Lebanon for redevelopment and mine clearance. These Arabic NGOs working together

to strive for better situations among each other is a great event and will bring much success to the landmine situation among all of them.

It is organizations like these that will ultimately help the problem of landmines, especially in Egypt. Time will tell when those who are able to walk on Egyptian land will feel safe with every step. ■

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