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History

Once known as the "Paris of the Middle East," Lebanon has suffered through numerous wars that have delayed the rebuilding of the once prosperous economy. In 2001, The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to downgrade UNIFIL, the UN peacekeeping troops in Lebanon, turning the 23-year-old operation into a military observer force. UNIFIL's current strength is 4,500 troops and has been dropping steadily since Israel withdrew from the south last May. The force stood at around 5,800 at the beginning of this year, and intentions are to reduce that number to 2,000 by the summer of 2002.

Landmine / UXO Overview

Dangers posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance throughout south Lebanon are significant. Travelers should be aware of posted mine warnings and strictly avoid all areas where mines and UXO may be present. Estimates of the landmine problem vary, with the Lebanese Army claiming that there are approximately 150,000 landmines. UNMAS has stated that there is a high level of contamination, especially along the border zones and areas of confrontation. Most minefields in southern Lebanon are unmarked and unfenced.

Casualties

There have been a number of landmine-related incidents since the withdrawal of Israeli troops opened up formerly occupied areas to civilians. A survey by the Landmine Resource Center found that injuries occurred approximately once a week. Assistance to survivors is scarce, and when it is available, it is expensive. There is also limited awareness regarding rehabilitative programs. Since May 2000, 132 mine casualties have been recorded.

Demining

The Lebanese Army, through the National Demining Office, carries out mine clearance. The United Nations claims that the Lebanese Army's capacities are limited, since the deminers are not trained to current humanitarian standards and have only a small number of modern mine detectors. The U.S. Office for Humanitarian Demining Programs has contributed six mine-detecting dog teams to the Lebanese Army through assistance from the Marshall Legacy Institute and the Humpty Dumpty Institute. *1 Together, these teams and the Lebanese Army cleared 23,293 anti-personnel mines, 4,905 anti-tank mines, and 827,187 m² of land between October 1999 and April 2001, according to the 2001 Landmine Monitor Report.

Reality Check

The Lebanese government set up the Commission of Inquiry in January 2000 as a result of pressure from the families of those who "disappeared" during the 15-year civil war from 1975 to 1990. The Committee for the Relatives of the

Kidnapped and Missing has been holding vigils near the weekly cabinet meetings outside the Beirut Museum, at a notorious checkpoint between east and west Beirut where many people were seized by militias and "disappeared."

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