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The **Challenge** of Managing Mine Action in **Jordan**

by HRH Prince Mired R. Z. Al-Hussein [Chairman of the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation, Jordan and Special Envoy of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention]

Over the course of two decades, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan worked diligently to rid itself of landmines despite monumental challenges. In comparison to other mine-affected countries, the difficulties that Jordan faced may have been miniscule, but for a developing country with minimal natural resources in a very volatile region of the world, the task was enormous. The initial estimate of landmines buried in Jordanian territory was over 300,000, the vast majority of which were laid by the Jordanian military along the kingdom's western border after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and along its northern border after the Syrian incursion into Jordan in 1970.

The simplest answer to the frequently posed question: "How did Jordan manage to do it given the circumstances?" is *national ownership*. Jordan embraced the notion wholeheartedly and strived to fulfill the obligations as set forth in the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC)*. However, what worked in Jordan might not necessarily work elsewhere. Embracing ownership will not guarantee that resources will flow in response to needs, although it significantly encourages cooperation between those with needs and those in a position to provide assistance. This was very much the case vis-à-vis Jordan.

When I first started working on this issue in late 2004, the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation (NCDR) was in a difficult situation. The NCDR had been established in 2000, but there was little funding from donor countries, and the organization was struggling to survive. After changing the board and selecting a new national director, I worked on formulating a national mine action plan with

all the relevant stakeholders and made sure that it accommodated Jordan's overall national plan for development. Next we called for a general meeting with all of our potential donors and explained to them in detail what we hoped to achieve. After a great deal of discussion and negotiation, the European Union (EU) decided that it would "go out on a limb" and support us in demining a certain area in the northern part of the Jordan Valley.

From that point forward, things began to take off. Over the following years, 24 donor nations and entities provided US\$44 million in funding for Jordan to conduct clearance, training in all aspects, capacity development, mine risk education (MRE), survey, monitoring, advocacy, and survivor assistance. However, we quickly realized that if we relied solely on Jordan's Royal Engineers to conduct the demining, the task would take much longer and completion would remain a distant dream. Hence, the NCDR made the strategic decision to invite an international operator to assist with clearance efforts. In 2006, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) dramatically changed the situation in Jordan. NPA's contribution expedited demining and put Jordan on a trajectory toward success.

As Chairman of the NCDR, I tried to imbue upon my staff the imperativeness of doing things correctly. Our challenge was to create a viable, credible, and effective civilian national authority from scratch. This could only be achieved by persistently overcoming our challenges and bureaucratic difficulties, garnering community support and involvement, and creating and fostering information networks and donor partnerships. Maintaining transparency with stakeholders and partners helped foster relationships based on trust and confidence. This

was all achieved through the hard work and political will of His Majesty the King, the Prime Minister, the relevant ministers, the Chief of Staff, and everyone else involved down to the deminer in the field. I wholeheartedly encourage mine-affected countries not to be despondent about the circumstances at hand, despite the challenges, but rather adopt the right attitude and muster the will to get the job done. The fundamentals of conducting a successful mine action program are well known and should be pursued with gusto.

Despite the tremendous efforts of our Royal Engineers and NPA, Jordan applied in 2008 for an extension to the Article 5 deadline, as the clearance of the northern border was taking much longer than we had initially anticipated. The States Parties approved this request, and Jordan, again with NPA's support, was granted an additional three years to complete the task, which it did by the spring of 2012.

A great testimony to the professionalism of NPA and the Jordanians who worked on the clearance of our northern border was the fact that there were no reported injuries among the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees that fled Syria on foot post-2012, as a result of the internal conflict brought on by the Arab Spring. These poor, traumatized human beings streamed across our northern border from all directions; over areas that had recently been densely contaminated with landmines. The question that bears asking is, what would have happened to all these innocent lives had we not cleared our border in time? Would they have risked breaching our minefields to save their own lives? The answer is most likely "yes."

Additionally, and as a further consequence of our commitment to owning the problem, we conducted a desk study to review the demining that was done by our military, primarily during the pre-Ottawa Convention period and after, in the Jordan Valley. The military did a phenomenal job in clearing vast areas, but during the early and mid-90s, there were neither international nor national demining standards. Hence, we were confronted with the dilemma of whether to go back and take another look at these areas that were officially declared cleared, and that were being cultivated by farmers and used for various purposes. In 2009, we decided that it was our responsibility to ensure the areas were indeed cleared. As a result of our increased capacity, technical expertise, and newly established national standards, we closely examined the "old ex-minefields" to see if any additional action would be necessary.

We called this endeavor the Sampling and Verification Project, as we were unsure what we would discover. The old ex-minefields were cleared and the lands were being utilized, but there was a discrepancy in many areas between the number of landmines originally laid and those



A map of mined areas in Jordan that appeared in Issue 5.3 of *The Journal* in 2001.

demined. After an initial assessment of the situation, we determined that the right thing to do was to authorize further investigation. We nevertheless took on this challenge with vigor and expended a big effort to verify that the minefields that were declared clear some 14 years earlier by our military were in fact clear and if any further measures were necessary, to conduct clearance expeditiously. Despite tremendous financial obstacles, the project was finally completed during the early summer of 2018.

As for victim assistance (VA), Jordan adopted a two-track policy by addressing the needs of landmine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) survivors on the one hand while also promoting the rights of all persons with disabilities in the kingdom more broadly. The needs of survivors are substantial and can always use more direct support. Despite this challenge and the limited funding available, Jordan has nevertheless afforded the vast number of landmine and ERW survivors, especially the most difficult and complicated cases, with genuine support over the years. This is done through micro-credit projects, securing employment, material and financial



HRH Prince Mired R.Z. Al-Hussein of Jordan signing the Maputo Declaration for a Mine-Free World in 2014. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

assistance, counseling, physical rehabilitation, providing prostheses, and other types of social support.

In 2017, Jordan enacted Law Number 20 for “The Rights of Persons with Disabilities.” This law is the most progressive human rights-based legislation in our region of the Middle East. The articles in the law are cross-cutting and place obligations on most of the government ministries vis-à-vis education, health, diagnostic testing, accessibility, voting, employment, deinstitutionalization of persons with disabilities, and their integration and inclusion into society, etc. The challenge at the moment is one of implementation. The legal framework is in place, political will stands firm, awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities in general is more widespread, and yet implementation of the law is taking time due to financial constraints. Hopefully, with the support of our donor friends and partners we will be able to make headway on these issues in the near future, whereby our landmine and ERW survivors—and all persons with disabilities and their families in the kingdom—will feel that their lives have changed for the better.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm my country’s unyielding commitment to this noble cause. Even though we declared completion in 2012, we still remain active in mine action. We hope to focus our efforts in the near future on VA issues, MRE, and training. As I mentioned earlier, our journey in mine action started in the early 1990s and has been a bumpy ride at times. But with the hard work and dedication

of all Jordanians who have worked tirelessly in mine action, the input of survivors, and the generosity of donors and partners, Jordan has been able to persevere and overcome the challenges. ©

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