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ITF’s Experience with Regional Cooperation

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*International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance*

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ITF’s Experience with Regional Cooperation

A key element to the success of the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, particularly in Southeast Europe, has been its facilitation of a regional approach to mine action and subsequent contributions to regional structures and systems. Encouraging regional cooperation is an important confidence-building measure, not only in countries emerging from conflict but also in countries undergoing transition. A regional approach has become one of the guiding principles of ITF’s work.1

Regional Cooperation Rationale
There are direct and indirect benefits of regional cooperation between affected countries on mine-action issues. These benefits can be clustered into the following aspects:3

1. Resources: Cooperation prevents the duplication of resources and efforts—financial, physical, material and human.
2. Coordination and information: Interaction facilitates the exchange of effective and efficient solutions to unique or similar landmine problems.
3. Social: Social networking and confidence building between counterparts in the region encourages current— as well as future—cooperation efforts.
4. Capacity-building: Cooperation augments institutional capacities, and established institutions can help those with less experience and stability.
5. Cross-cutting: Mine-action activities can aid other regional issues, such as border security, development and commerce. Even though mine action tends to develop on a national basis, there have been sufficient incentives and benefits to its application on a regional basis. ITF has promoted and applied the regional approach in Southeast Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

The ITF’s Regional Efforts
A regional approach is a vital dimension of ITF’s activities, important issues can be addressed more efficiently and cost-effectively if the countries in the region help each other become mine-free.1 ITF helps to mobilize funding, raise awareness, build capacity and catalyze activities across a region. It perceives these roles as mutually supportive, allowing it to serve as an effective agent in providing assistance and promoting mine-action activities.

SEEMACC. The need to exchange views, expertise and experience in mine action in the region of Southeast Europe was recognized at the first meeting of directors of Southeast Europe mine-action centers and ITF in April 2000, leading to the formation of the South-Eastern Europe Mine Action Coordination Council.5 The directors of the centers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia signed the agreement to establish SEEMACC, together with ITF, in November 2000. In addition to the original founders, other organizations achieved membership observer status.

The mission of SEEMACC is to develop a sustainable regional mine-action program to enable development and economic recovery of affected areas and provide assistance to mine victims. The guiding principles of SEEMACC’s work are based on a holistic approach, including neutrality, humanity, partnership and activities executed in accordance with national concepts.
SEEMACC’s work has resulted in acceptance of a common regional strategy, regional standard-operating procedures, and an accreditation system for demining organizations, as well as support in the development of regional institutional capacities since the Council’s inception, the U.S. Department of State through ITF has financially supported the ongoing working visits by project staff have facilitated cross-border demining projects.

Central Asian cooperation. In 2008, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan and ITF joined forces for the project “Facilitation of Central Asian Regional Co-operation in Mine Action.” The wider project purpose, which will be achieved through several phases, is to establish effective and sustainable regional cooperation in the field of mine action and other cross-cutting issues among six states in Central Asia: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

In the initial phase, implemented in 2009, the project partners are working to create the framework for a regional mine action cooperation body. Initial working visits by project staff have already shown a willingness to create a joint initiative. The initial phase will conclude with an ITF-organized multilateral conference on regional cooperation in Central Asia and Afghanistan in late 2009.

Cross-border Demining in Southeast Europe. From April 2003 to December 2006, ITF managed a 2.85-million-euro (US $4,151,000) grant from the European Union to facilitate cross-border demining projects in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. In total, 1.74 square kilometers (0.67 square mile) of land were cleared, with more than 2,700 mines and 536 pieces of UXO found and destroyed during the implementation of demining projects.

Conclusion Regional cooperation in mine action facilitates the utilization of resources, coordination of mine action efforts, networking, capacity and confidence-building efforts, among other things. Within Southeast Europe, where the common goal of a mine-free region has been set, regional cooperation in mine action has reached a mature level at which joint efforts span from well-established coordination forums to cooperation on strategic, operational and technical levels.

It is ITF’s opinion that regional cooperation in mine action has the potential to develop and succeed outside of Southeast Europe, as well. Furthermore, there are realistic possibilities for regional cooperation in mine action to include other cross-cutting issues such as development, small arms and light weapons, and border management.

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In Remembrance

Felisberto Novele

by Cory Kulick [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

Felisberto Novele, a member of Mine Action Center Cyprus, was killed by an anti-tank explosion on 28 October 2009. Novele, 48, was working in Yeri, only 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) southeast of Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. A native of Mozambique, Novele is the first death MACC has suffered during its five years of working on the island, although nine people, including civilians and deminers, were injured in 2008.

Cyprus has been affected by landmines since the 1974 crisis between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Landmines were laid by both sides, including inside of the buffer zone created after the conflict. The buffer zone, now controlled by United Nations forces, consists of three percent of the island and holds agricultural land valuable to farmers. Mine clearance in the buffer zone is managed by the MACC, which plans, coordinates and monitors the clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance. Working alongside U.N. Peacekeeping Forces in Cyprus, MACC has cleared 57 minefields, covering 65 square kilometers (25 miles) of land.

In a 2008 interview with Blue Beret magazine, Novele said he was proud of the work he was doing. “Our efforts are to guarantee the new generations of the future a safer world,” he said. “The land cleared can give way for [hospitals and schools] and that is why I am proud.” Novele was supporting a wife and eight children, as well as a widowed mother.

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