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A Broader Canvas: Jordan’s ERW Training Course

by Mohammad Breikat [ National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation ]

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The Kingdom of Jordan has a long record of participating in international humanitarian crisis-prevention and peacekeeping efforts. On a per-capita basis, Jordan is one of the largest contributors to U.N. peacekeeping missions—with an emphasis on providing field hospitals and support for mine action. Jordan regularly deploys relief supplies and heavy equipment when natural disasters strike around the world.

In the mine-action sector, Jordan’s National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation has hosted a number of mine-affected countries (including Iraq, Libya, Mauritania and Sudan) over the past few years to exchange ideas and share tactics on a range of subjects. NCDR staff have also traveled to programs in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, Croatia, Lebanon and South Korea to learn how each country has addressed its unique challenges. In May 2009, the NCDR moved to the next phase in connecting with other mine-affected countries, it sent two of its operations and blend the classroom theory and practice at the front line. The threats come in the form of what are generally classified as explosive remnants of war. A broader than landmines, ERW are explosive often left strewn across a war-torn landscape and are not necessarily intended to be activated through human contact. ERW, therefore, include a wide variety of threats ranging from abandoned or unexploded artillery shells, cluster submunitions and unspent rockets to the more ubiquitous scourge of landmines. In fact, cluster munitions are seen as so problematic that an international convention was created at the end of 2008 to deal with the hazard. As recent events in the Middle East have demonstrated, the threat of ERW is pervasive. It not only breeds terror and fear, but it also affects the health, stability, commerce, education, agriculture and public safety of a community. ERW remediation is not an area that lends itself to easy management because it is a multi-faceted issue and deals with many diverse functions during volatile periods in a country’s history. Despite the pressing need to develop national capacities to cope with ERW, an internationally coordinated approach has thus far been absent.

Building on the considerable capacity that exists in the mine-action sector (skills, knowledge systems, standards, procedures and institutional organization), the NC DR began to approach donors and potential partners to establish a one-month intensive training course in Jordan that would build on previous United Nations Development Programme Senior Mine Action Managers’ Courses. The Jordan ERW training course would address both the latent needs of the mine-action community and the increasing capacity-development needs related to the more broadly defined ERW sector. Based on several high-level meetings, UNDP commissioned reports and presentations, and a joint NCDR-UNDP questionnaire, it was determined that there was a demand for further management training to strengthen national capacity to deal with ERW that are curtailting reconstruction and recovery in war-torn societies. As it is still affected by ERW, Jordan provides an excellent opportunity to view ongoing operations and blend the classroom theory with field application.

October Launch

Through a grant from the Bureau of Political Military Affairs’ Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State, the first training course was held from 11 October through 5 November 2009, and a second course is scheduled for November 2010. Applying a unique blend of theoretical, methodological and case-study materials, the Jordan Explosive Remnants of War Training Course provided first-class instruction on the design and management of national responses to the presence of landmines and ERW. Based on the campus of the former United Nations University in Amman, Jordan, the NC DR course was coordinated through close cooperation with James Madison University’s Mine Action Information Center and utilized experts from JMU, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining Implementation Support Unit, International Committee of the Red Cross, Mines Advisory Group, Norwegian People’s Aid and the United Nations Mine Action Team. The course was global in scope and was open to 30 participants at a time. It was taught in English and operated for a period of six weeks—two weeks via long-distance education prior to arrival in Amman followed by four weeks of in-residence lectures, group work and field exercises in Jordan. Invitations to apply for the course were sent out in July 2009 and the costs for accepted applicants were fully covered as part of the grant.

Dr. Mohammad Breikat, A Broader Canvas: Jordan’s ERW Training Course

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