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Jordan: Safeguarding Life and Promoting Development

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The Forward

UN agencies have been taking extra care in planning activities in recent years due to limited funding; however, it is slowly becoming a trend to link mine action with other development projects to maximize the effectiveness of available funding. For instance, MRE activities have been linked with area-based interventions and other activities under child protection, while mine clearance is linked with agricultural development in southern Iraq.

The country still requires mine-action support from the international community—support that will put a premium on national ownership, sustainability, and integrating mine action into other humanitarian and development activities. This emphasis means that technical advisory support needs to be complemented with management capacity-building and financial support that can be provided in tandem with the obligations of the Ottawa Convention. It is an encouraging indication that on 15 August 2007, Iraq acceded to the Ottawa Convention, becoming the 155th State Party. This action is expected to encourage the international community to fund urgently needed support.

The Convention entered into force 1 February 2008 with Iraq's initial transparency report required under Article 7 to be submitted no later than July 2008. The deadline for the destruction of stockpiles will be 1 February 2012 and the deadline for the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control is 1 February 2018.

Counterattacks

In Iraq, the destructive and inhumane legacy of mines and ERW deserves stronger advocacy and action. Amidst a surge of foreign assistance in demining and reconstruction, equal attention should be paid to mine/ERW contamination prevailing in the country. Thousands of victims, especially those who have been maimed and severely disabled—categorized as the most vulnerable patients—need considerable medical assistance and socioeconomic recovery support. Mine action should be on the same agenda as the rest of reconstruction and development because mine action is an enabling action for livelihood, safe access to health care and schools, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance.

As a representative of UNDP, we would like to underscore our deep appreciation for the support from donors thus far to help save the lives and livelihood of innocent Iraqi civilians. By Salomon Schreuder, Senior Mine Action Advisor UNDP, E-mail: salomon.schreuder@undp.org, Tel: +962 79 651 4017, P.O. Box 941024, 10 Midjif Al Ekan Street, Shermansat, Amman 11194, Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is the only mine-affected country among its neighbours to ratify the Ottawa Convention, which went into effect 1 May 1999. Landmines lie along the borders with Israel, in Wadi Araba, and Syria, in the northern region, and there is landmine/undetonated ordnance contamination in the Jordan Valley. Jordan has taken ownership of the problem. Complying with the Convention is seen as a critical stage in strengthening relations in the Middle East because Jordan will be an example to other countries in the region facing similar problems. In April 2002, His Majesty King Abdullah issued a royal decree establishing the Board of Directors of the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation. The NCDR is the primary national mine-action authority responsible for establishing and managing the National Mine Action Programme and ensuring that it is anchored in the overall development goals and strategies of the country. Furthermore, the NCDR makes sure all aspects of mine action are integrated—including mine clearance, mine-risk education, and survivor and victim assistance—as well as coordinates and leads resource mobilization. Mine-risk education and mine-victim assistance are conducted by many national and international organizations in collaboration with the NCDR.

In September 2005, NPA was asked to assist the NCDR in clearing the Wadi Araba region. NPA deployed an assessment mission to Jordan in November 2005. The mission concluded that NPA could contribute to a clearance operation in a cost-effective and timely fashion, utilizing both innovative methodology and clearance procedures developed over the past four years in Sri Lanka. The assessment mission confirmed the commitment of the NCDR to combat the mine problem in the country and to support and facilitate NPA in the establishment of a mine-action programme in Jordan. NPA employs 165 people working directly on demining projects. Demining is conducted by the Royal Engineering Corps and Norwegian People’s Aid. Localized impact on communities is considered moderate to severe by international standards. The landmines act as a barrier to large socioeconomic development projects that would benefit the whole nation.

By Esma Al-Samarai and Stephen Bryant [Norwegian People’s Aid]

Off-the-shelf Solutions Save Lives in Iraq

Military personnel in Iraq are using an ever-increasing list of unconventional civilian materials to provide new solutions to common problems. Insurgents in the country bury improvised explosive devices along roadways frequented by U.S. military personnel, concealing the weapons under dirt and other debris.

The U.S. Army’s Rapid Equipping Force responded by strapping commercially made leaf blowers to the front of vehicles. The blowers, usually used by golf courses, had only to undergo some minor fortification of a rotating nozzle before they were field-ready.

The RFF has also had success in adapting other civilian items to the Iraqi conflict. Red lasers are often difficult to see, so the RFF began importing green lasers from Taiwan, where they are used for civilian purposes like teaching and bird-watching. Soldiers can use the easy-to-see green lasers to warn motorists approaching checkpoints that they must stop. Alternatives, like firing warning shots, frequently scare motorists, who often accelerate, forcing soldiers to open fire.

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News Brief

Minel-sweeping dogs are being used for Technical Survey and quality assurance. The method is effective and efficient.
that Jordan reaches the obligations under the Ottawa Convention by May 2009 so that landmines no longer impact communities nor are an impediment to further social and economic development. NPA also considers the environmental effect of its work.

NPA’s Operations

When NPA first arrived in Jordan, it was informed that approximately 12 million square metres (4.6 square miles) were considered contaminated. Jordan has a rich agricultural land that is suitable for cultivation but has been contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance. As the first step towards clearing the land, detailed foot reconnaissance operations were conducted. NPA is collecting all available information from the Jordanian Armed Forces, along with relevant minefield records and sketches from the Israeli Defence Forces. A detailed desk survey was conducted. NPA went through all the relevant information and confirmed that the records provided were accurate. NPA has remained uncultivated, irrigation and tourism in the area, as well as the mega strategic importance over the last decade.

Since well before the Ottawa Convention came into being. Jordan has continued to provide a country free of landmines and UXO, the re-utilisation of the agricultural land along the border, where agriculture is the primary source of income. It is also worth mentioning that Jordan hosted the Eighth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in November 2007. See Endnotes, page 100.

In 2007, the Royal Jordanian Armed Forces (RJA) informed that approximately 12 million square metres (3.62 acres) of land had been cleared using the land-release concept. The actual area that required clearance is less than 250,000 square metres (62 acres). The clearing operations are making strides toward reaching their goal of complying with the Ottawa Convention and establishing Jordan as a mine action leader in the Middle East. The Jordanian government has taken the landmine problem very seriously since well before the Ottawa Convention came into being. Jordan continues to provide landmines and UXO, and the actual theme of the land-release concept is a landmass no longer impacted by landmines.

When NPA arrived in Jordan, an estimated 12 million square metres (4.6 square miles) were suspected hazardous areas. The NPA has since cleared 12 million square metres (4.6 square miles) of land that actually need clearing. This means saving lives and limbs and reducing the socioeconomic impact of mines and UXO. The effects of mines and UXO are closely linked to poverty; therefore, an aggressive approach to mine action and development is necessary. This includes reducing the clearance and reducing the clearance process by 80 percent. The clearance and reduction of contaminated land has a direct environmental benefit to the pristine environments of the Middle East. The Wadi Araba region has gained in environmental effect of its work. This means saving lives and limbs and reducing the socioeconomic impact of mines and UXO.

The construction of a university campus is planned in the Aqaba area and there are plans for further development of hydro-electricity and tourism in the area, as well as the mega Red Dead Sea pipeline project, which will have major bearings on the future development and quality of life for Jordanians.

Conclusion

The National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation and Norwegian People’s Aid are making strides toward reaching their goal of complying with the Ottawa Convention and establishing Jordan as a mine action leader in the Middle East. The Jordanian government has taken the landmine problem very seriously since well before the Ottawa Convention came into being. Jordan continues to provide landmines and UXO, and the actual theme of the land-release concept is a landmass no longer impacted by landmines and UXO.

Getting a Piece of the Pie: Lebanese Women Become Deminers

The Swedish Rescue Services Agency was one of the first organisations to enter Lebanon after the ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel. The enormous amount of unexploded ordnance littering southern Lebanon led to a need for a more sustainable programme than the initial small operation provided. The more expansive programme sought deminers and, to the surprise of the SRSA, many women showed interest. Several were hired and trained, and they proved themselves to be able workers in the field. The success of the program in Lebanon has had some wondering why it has taken so long for women in the Middle East to enter into the field of mine clearance and disposal.