Survey and Ordnance Disposal in the Polisario-controlled Areas of the Western Sahara

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wherever possible. MAG was also fortunate in being able to provide practical help and guidance to the HCND and make every effort to provide ships with a number of key personnel within the area. It has enabled MAG to build a more detailed picture of the high levels of contamination in and around Zouarke. By December 2006, MAG had identified 84 dangerous areas in and around Zouarke. By December 2006, MAG had identified 84 dangerous areas in and around Zouarke.

**Project Background**

The 16-year-long military conflict left Western Sahara littered with mines and explosive remnants of war. The densest concentration of mines and ERW is found to the east of the town, the 2,400-kilometre (1,491-mile) earthwork fortification that runs the length of Western Sahara and divides the Moroccan and the Polisario-controlled zones. The town is part of a series of walls, ditches and minefields constructed by Moroccan forces between 1981 and 1987.

Mines and ERW are found near settlements throughout areas now under Polisario control that were previously captured and temporarily occupied by Moroccan forces. Mines and ERW are also found in ambush sites in the vicinity of former Moroccan military supply routes as well as recent routes and water holes used by the Polisario.

ERW identified during the course of the primary survey conducted in October 2005 and February/March 2006 by Landmine Action included mostly United States- and French-manufactured ammunition, due to their strong military support of Morocco. Countries such as China, the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia supplied some ammunition for the conflict—although not manufactured in Morocco through third-party countries. China, the former Soviet Union, and the countries were aware of MAG’s work and clear intentions is to train members of the local population in an explosive-ordnance-disposal programme.

**Obstructive**

In October 2006, Landmine Action, a U.K.-based NGO, began conducting a survey of the threat mines and ERW posed in the northern sector of the Polisario-controlled zone. One of the objectives for Landmine Action is to analyze the survey data to assess and prioritize land in terms of need and feasibility of the marking, clearance, removal and destruction of ERW and mines. Since the start of 2007, Landmine Action has been carrying out the marking, clearing, removal and destruction of the ERW.

The organisation’s project offers a long-term solution to the problem through the establishment of a local demining and explosive-ordnance-disposal capacity. The strategy and structure of the survey are to comply with the recommendations of a United Nations Mine Action Standards

**International Mine Action Standards**

The survey is conducted in accordance with the recommendations of a United Nations Mine Action Standards.
Summary of the Programme’s Field Results

From the time a fully operational programme was established (October 2006) until July 2007, the following results were achieved:

- 644 dangerous areas surveyed
- 120 danger areas found, of which 79 are from cluster strikes and 22 are minefields
- 353 spot tasks found—a single or a few items awaiting demolition in each (ranging from 20 cm cannon ammunition to a 500-pound aircraft bomb)
- 96 areas cancelled (previously reported as suspect/hazardous areas)
- Four route assessments completed
- 223 mines and pieces of UXO destroyed through EOD activities
- Two BAC tasks completed with 146,462 square metres (1,572,186 square feet) cleared using both visual and large-loop detector methods search

Fundraising and Donors

Landmine Action started preliminary survey work in the northern sector in October 2005 with a grant from the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund. In November 2005, the Polisario signed the Deed of Commitment to the 1997 Ottawa Treaty to ban Landmines, obliging it to ban the use of anti-personnel mines and destroy its current stockpiles. Landmine Action provided technical assistance to the Polisario in its destruction of an initial stockpile of APMs in February 2006 in a significant first step toward meeting those obligations. Shrinking the opportunity presented by the Polisario’s initiative in signing the Deed of Commitment, Landmine Action successfully applied for further funding from the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund and now funding from UNMAS and the MINURSO Force Commander Kurt Mosgaard, representatives from national and international NGOs, and civil society, as well as journalists from various countries in attendance.

Planned Activities for 2007 and 2008

Landmine Action’s objectives for the upcoming year include the following:

- Complete survey of areas of the Polisario-controlled zone of Western Sahara
- Perform EOD of prioritized ERW to reduce casualty rates, and to ensure safe access for civilians to water holes and pastures, and safe movement for civilians, peacekeeping and NGO vehicles along formalized routes
- Publish three-graded route maps for local civilian, peacekeeping and NGO vehicles
- Construct a comprehensive IMSMA database including survey, clearance and accident reports
- Raise awareness among the civilian population of the locations and risks posed by ERW and mines

Conclusion

Western Sahara can be free from mines and ERW only with the support of the international community and only after complete settlement of conflict; however, it is not good to sit on one’s hands and wait for political settlement while mines, unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions are still taking lives. At the time of this writing, the last victim in the Polisario-controlled zone was a 5-year-old child, killed by BLU 65 cluster submunitions in February 2007. We hope that humanitarian demining will help civilians and make this accident the last one.

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