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## UNIFIL Peacekeeping in Southern Lebanon

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# Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I was looking over Issue 14.3 of the *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* yesterday and Mr. Khalid Ibrahim Hamed's article, "Mine Action in North Sudan" (pages 44–46). I was quite concerned about the chance of the worker's eyes being injured when I saw he was not wearing his safety glasses properly. In the photo on page 45, open sparks are clearly flying up from his hand-held grinding wheel. Although his body is hiding the workspace, it is clear that his eyes are uncovered, wearing his glasses on his forehead. If a spark were to hit him in the face or eye, he would be quickly thrown off balance and fall since he is working with his crutch under his mid-thigh amputated leg. If he falls, the hand grinder's wheel may still be spinning and could cause additional cuts. Ideally, he should have a prosthetic leg while working. I am also concerned about the workers catching their crutches and tripping on the electrical cords that are lying on the bare earth floor beneath them.

I work in adaptive technology tools as a prosthetic technician. I am curious whether Sudan has occupational health and safety legislation that covers these issues. Certainly preventing secondary injuries is of prime importance for workers with disabilities across mine action. I would ask that you or Mr. Khalid Ibrahim Hamed please contact the victim-assistance program under the national mine action center and ask them to insist that workers cover their eyes with their safety goggles while working and that electrical cords are safely placed. I have learned that the workers pictured do not have prosthetic legs. Could the MAC also help with that issue?

I encourage dialogue on safe work practices for all workers in mine action, particularly those living with disabilities, and encourage active support for injured deminers. Thank you.

~Maureen Morton, Project Assistance, Inc.

*Editor's Note: We apologize for not realizing there was a problem with the photo. The author and the MAC have been alerted.*



Dear Editor,

I was pleased to see a demilitarization process line at the Mjekës factory in Albania featured on the cover of the Fall 2010 edition of *The Journal*, a fitting tribute to the outstanding work they have done over the last decade.

The otherwise excellent accompanying article by Captain Goodyear inadvertently gives the impression that there was a connection between the disastrous explosion at the Gërdec Depot in 2008 and the demilitarization projects managed by the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency in Albania from 2001 to 2007. The Gërdec operation was entirely unconnected with the NAMSAs-managed projects at Mjekës and Poliçan. The engineers and workers at both factories, particularly at Mjekës, did exceptional work in the last 10 years to develop effective, safe and environmentally responsible processes for the demilitarization of munitions stockpiles.

The article understates the scope of those projects, which were managed under the auspices of the NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund and supported by donations from 14 NATO countries, four partner countries and the European Union. The projects destroyed 12,000 tonnes [11,810 tons] of munitions, including mortars, grenades, more than 100 million rounds of small-arms ammunition and Albania's entire stockpile of 1.6 million anti-personnel landmines.

The ability to bring together so many diverse donor entities is a particular strength of the NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund, which has also enabled munitions stockpiles and ERW-destruction projects to be managed successfully in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine. The major project, due to start in Albania early in 2011, will be managed by NAMSAs under the NATO PFP Trust Fund but with only one sponsor, the United States. As ever, other donors will be warmly welcomed.

Yours sincerely,  
Peter Courtney-Green  
Head of NAMSAs's Ammunition Branch 1993–2009



## UNIFIL Peacekeeping in Southern Lebanon

Since 1978, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon has been working to help bring peace and security to the region. UNIFIL began humanitarian mine-action activities and cluster-munitions clearance in Lebanon in 2006. It also began to demine parts of the Blue Line, which is the demarcation line between Israel and Lebanon. This overview discusses a few UNIFIL projects.

by Christina Greene [ United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre ]

Mine-action operations by countries contributing troops to U.N. peacekeeping in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon fall between the traditionally defined *humanitarian-demining operations* and *military demining*, which involves breaching to allow for the advance and retreat of soldiers at war. UNIFIL demining operations have changed and evolved over the years and reflect many of the challenges and successes of mine action within the context of peacekeeping operations.

UNIFIL was established in 1978 with the mandate to "restore international peace and security."<sup>1</sup> Following the 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon, UNIFIL's mission expanded "to ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons."<sup>2</sup> Within the context of this mandate, UNIFIL contingents initially deployed with demining and explosive-ordnance-disposal capabilities; however, the scope of demining activities was limited to emergency action and clearance of land for UNIFIL positions. In response to the 2006 humanitarian crisis created by severe cluster-bomb contamination, UNIFIL troop-contributing countries deployed battle-area-clearance teams and focused on humanitarian mine-action tasks until early 2010.

Since 2007, UNIFIL also has engaged in a new project, demining access corridors for marking the Blue Line,<sup>3</sup> and from early 2010, UNIFIL troop-contributing countries phased out BAC tasks and focused exclusively on supporting UNIFIL's goal to physically mark the Blue Line. Working in conjunction with the UNIFIL troop-contributing countries through the J3 Combat Engineer Section, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre has similarly undergone a change in role and focus. In 2009 the responsibility for coor-

dination of humanitarian demining in Lebanon transitioned from the UNMACC to the Lebanon Mine Action Center. The UNMACC now coordinates between UNIFIL and LMAC, as well as supporting UNIFIL troop-contributing countries in complying with International Mine Action Standards.

Given the security context in Southern Lebanon, the UNIFIL peacekeepers conducting mine action in Southern Lebanon are fulfilling a unique role. More than 1,000 marked minefields run alongside the Blue Line. While the clearance of these minefields is not yet politically feasible, the need to physically mark the Blue Line requires the clearance of access lanes for the construction of blue-marker barrels.<sup>4</sup> As there is a high level of distrust between the Lebanese and Israeli militaries along the Blue Line, UNIFIL peacekeepers provide a neutral force that is able to operate there. The security sensitivity of this area was highlighted in August 2010 when the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israeli Defense Force clashed after the IDF attempted to cut down a tree next to the Blue Line near the village of El Aadeisse and Kafer Kela. The LAF perceived this to be a transgression of the Blue Line, and IDF and LAF exchanged fire across the border. One IDF soldier and two LAF soldiers were killed.

The joint demining operations between UNIFIL and international nongovernmental organizations also included clearance tasks for the Blue Line barrel-marking



A U.N. worker applies the finishing touches to a blue-marker barrel. All photos courtesy of UNMACC-SL.



A Blue-Line barrel is completed and measured.

project in 2007 and joint tasks with the Swedish Rescue Services Agency and Chinese peacekeepers in 2009, as well as clearance of the LAF patrol road north of the Blue Line. The clearance and reconstruction of the LAF road was conducted by SRSA and UNIFIL in 2009. In 2010, UNIFIL and MAG (Mines Advisory Group) conducted joint operations on the LAF road north of the Blue Line. MAG provided mechanical and manual clearance and UNIFIL construction units (Italian and Portuguese) conducted road construction.

#### Criticisms

The role of visiting military forces in mine action has been greatly debated. The 2003 Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining report on *The Role of the Military in Mine Action*<sup>5</sup> analyzed many of the strengths and weaknesses of military actors performing mine action and specifically pointed out shortcomings of UNIFIL's demining operations in conducting critical coordination and complying with IMAS. Thanks to the coordination role played by UNMACC and the dialogue within UNIFIL, many aspects of UNIFIL troop-contributing countries' demining operations have been

improved and problems resolved by encouraging the use of one standard for all troop-contributing countries and through assistance and monitoring of training and accreditation with the Lebanon Mine Action Center. Greater coordination among UNIFIL, LMAC and other mine-action actors in Southern Lebanon has increased the efficiency and safety of operations on many occasions in 2007, 2009 and 2010 on the Blue Line and for the Lebanese Armed Forces patrol road north of the Blue Line.

One of the main criticisms levied against operations by visiting militaries has been the militaries' adherence to their own operational guidelines instead of compliance with International Mine Action Standards. Troop-contributing countries have sometimes perceived a distinction between humanitarian demining and operational demining in support of peacekeeping operations and have argued that peacekeeping operations are not humanitarian activities and therefore not subject to IMAS. The United Nations has made a firm point that demining operations are to be in accordance with IMAS. Coordination, training and support provided by UNMACC have now ensured that all troop-contributing

countries in Lebanon are accredited to IMAS and to the Lebanese Mine Action Standards. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is currently in negotiations to ensure that all troop-contributing countries are contractually mandated to receive IMAS accreditation and provide IMAS-approved equipment. It is worth noting that the troop-contributing countries are conducting operational tasks but are using humanitarian standards of operations.

#### Challenges/Suggested Solutions

While peacekeeping demining operations have achieved great strides in improving performance on the ground as well as increasing coordination with national authorities, UNIFIL demining operations still face challenges. As of October 2010, teams from Belgium, China, France, Italy and Spain were deployed. The troop-contributing countries' teams within UNIFIL are on an operational rotation between four and 10 months. This means that, as often as every four months, team members are replaced and the team is required to undergo training and accreditation. As a result, there has been a lack of institutional knowledge retained within the teams. It has been suggested that a training team remain behind for the incumbent team and the command structure for the incumbent team arrive prior to the mission to maintain institutional knowledge between current and incumbent team(s). Some troop-contributing countries have already started adopting such measures.

The UNMACC does provide a center of institutional knowledge within UNIFIL; however, a longer rotation by peacekeeping teams



An accredited Spanish mine-clearance team in 2010.

would increase their efficiency and familiarity with the mine and explosive-remnants-of-war situation in South Lebanon.

UNMACC has provided a much-needed support role for the troop-contributing countries' demining teams in coordination with the UNIFIL Combat Engineering Section; however, disagreements arise between the civilian UNMACC and the military staff from UNIFIL whenever UNIFIL perceives infringement upon its own military chain of command. Coordination of the demining peacekeepers' troop-contributing countries requires sensitivity to the fact that militaries operate to a strict chain of command and are not as flexible as other mine-action organizations. On the other hand, UNIFIL must also be open to receiving instruction and support from coordinating bodies such as UNMACC and LMAC that have a wealth of expertise and experience to offer for such operations. UNIFIL's mine-action operations have demonstrated that demining troop-contributing countries are able to provide a significant and unique role within peacekeeping operations and within mine ac-

tion. While many of their tasks are not necessarily humanitarian in nature, they contribute to stabilization of insecure regions. To ensure the successful implementation of troop-contributing countries' demining operations, the existence of a coordinating body such as UNMACC is critical to ensure coordination with national authorities and adherence to IMAS/LMAS, as well as the continuation of institutional knowledge for operations, quality assurance, training and accreditation. ↴

see endnotes page 81



Christina Greene has worked in mine action for seven years, holding positions in Washington D.C., Sudan and, most recently, in Lebanon as the Programme Officer with the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre. Greene holds a Master of Arts in international affairs from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

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