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Jordan: Safeguarding Life and Promoting Development

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Jordan: Safeguarding Life and Promoting Development

Jordan signed the Ottawa Convention¹ in 1999 and is working to comply with the regulations by the May 2009 deadline. Jordan has enlisted Norwegian People's Aid to help the Royal Engineering Corps meet its deadline. Surveys have been completed and suspected hazardous areas have been significantly reduced. NPA is continuing to demine areas with the help of mine-detecting dogs and a MineWolf machine. The overall goal is to clear the land to allow agriculture and industry to return to areas currently inaccessible due to the threat of landmines.



Mine-detecting dogs are being used for Technical Survey and quality assurance.
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUHAIB ABU SHEIKHA

by Esma Al-Samarai and Stephen Bryant [Norwegian People's Aid]

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/unexploded 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 mobilisation. Mine-risk education and mine-victim assistance are conducted by many national and international organisations 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, utilising 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 Engineers Corps and Norwegian People's Aid. Localised impact on communities is considered moderate to severe by international standards. The minefields act as a barrier to large socioeconomic development projects that would benefit the whole nation.

Situation Analysis: NPA Assisting Jordan

In January 2006, NPA deployed a start-up team to establish the proposed humanitarian mine-action programme. To date, using Jordanian-trained teams and the rake method, the mine-action programme in Jordan has cleared a total of 102,138 square metres (25 acres) and removed 29,294 of 62,732 anti-personnel mines and 6,129 out of 8,421 anti-tank mines. NPA is using mine-detecting dogs for Technical Survey and quality assurance. In addition, the original MineWolf tiller and flail machine is being used for verification of the areas in Wadi Araba.

By invitation from the NCDR, NPA has been further tasked with clearing the last remaining hurdle in Jordan's efforts to comply with the Mine Ban Convention: contamination in the north along the Syrian border. In addition, NPA is implementing a Landmine Retrofit Survey² to quantify the impact. The NCDR also contracts NPA to provide technical assistance where requested and relevant, and to assist in the development of the national authority.

NPA's Goals

Working in cooperation with the NCDR, NPA's main goal is to enhance the opportunity and ability of individuals and communities to control their own lives. NPA's immediate goal is to assist and ensure

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 identified as suspected hazardous areas. As the first step toward releasing some of the land in this area, 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

Future Plans for the Region

Jordan has long suffered the negative impact of landmines. Rich agricultural land has remained uncultivated, irrigation and water projects delayed, housing construction postponed, and historical and world cultural heritage sites unexplored. Based on the data collected from government sources and the Royal Engineers Corps, it is estimated that roughly 500,000 people (8 percent of the population) are affected by the presence of mines. National efforts to eradicate the landmine threat in Jordan have been underway since 1993 when His Majesty the late King Hussein instructed the REC to begin humanitarian mine clearance in the Jordan Valley.

The Wadi Araba region has gained in strategic importance over the last decade. The construction of a university campus is planned in the Aqaba area and there are plans

came into being. Jordan continues to provide funds and expertise to create a country free of landmines. The removal of the humanitarian threat of landmines to local populations and the re-utilisation of the agricultural land along the Syrian border will help alleviate poverty 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 110



When NPA arrived in Jordan, an estimated 12 million square metres (four square miles) were suspected hazardous areas. The NPA has since identified 250,000 square metres (62 acres) that actually need clearing.

concluded that most land from the SHAs should be cancelled.³ Many field visits and detailed foot reconnaissance operations were conducted to determine the exact place, location and size of the minefields or SHAs.

NPA undertook a targeted Technical Survey to find the actual contaminated areas. As mentioned, the size of the SHA before area cancellation and area reduction⁴ was 12 million square metres (4.6 square miles); 7.8 million square metres (three square miles) of it (65 percent) has been cancelled and reduced using the land-release concept. The actual area that requires clearance is less than 250,000 square metres (62 acres).

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



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