

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 11
Issue 2 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 28

April 2008

Mine Action Support Group Update

CISR JOURNAL

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

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Recommended Citation

JOURNAL, CISR (2008) "Mine Action Support Group Update," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 11 : Iss. 2 , Article 28.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol11/iss2/28>

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Mine Action Support Group Update

This article contains excerpts from the United Nations' third quarterly newsletter in 2007, which highlights the activities of the Mine Action Support Group from July to September 2007, including updates from the United Nations Mine Action Service, the United Nations Development Programme and UNICEF.¹

excerpted by Rachel Canfield [Mine Action Information Center]

The Mine Action Support Group, established in 1998, meets quarterly to aid discussion between donors and U.N. mine-action partners. The MASG has 27 members and invites representatives from mine-affected countries, experts and nongovernmental organizations to share information about mine action in their countries. The group's goal is to simplify donor coordination and ease funding.

Developments in UNMAS Programs

Afghanistan. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan continued to conduct tasks in support of the humanitarian and development objectives throughout the country despite a range of serious security incidents occurring over the reporting period. These problems included raids by antigovernment elements on NGOs implementing partner compounds in Kandahar in late June and early July 2007; the abduction and later release of 19 NGO personnel in Ghazni in late June; the abduction and killing of three NGO personnel in the Panjwayi Valley area of Kandahar in August; and three ambushes on a single NGO convoy moving from Kandahar to Kabul in September, resulting in the abduction of two more staff members. In addition to the continued holding of the two NGO personnel from this last incident, over US\$500,000 of equipment was stolen or destroyed between July and September 2007, seriously debilitating continued operations in these locations. As a result, the MAPA has relocated the bulk of assets from the southern area to more secure locations in the central and western areas, while overall security procedures have been increased nationwide.

Meanwhile, ongoing consultations among UNMAS, the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan and the government of Afghanistan seek to identify optimal approaches for eventual transition of responsibility for mine action from the United Nations to the government. Additional discussions on the planning and support of this process were held between UNMAS and senior U.N. officials in Afghanistan from United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UNDP, as well as representatives from the donor community in order to ensure an integrated approach.

Eritrea. The new program manager for the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Centre for the Temporary Security Zone in Ethiopia and Eritrea assumed duties in Asmara. The end of the rainy season allowed increased mine-action activity, which was temporarily slowed due to access difficulties. Mine-action activities continued to feature as a critical component of the mission's success, reflecting the high degree of positive engagement with local communities and security forces. UNMACC hosted the mission's World Peace Day activities in September with a capability demonstration and mine-risk education activities.

South Lebanon. One year after the July/August 2006 war, new cluster munitions strike locations continue to be discovered in South Lebanon

(15 additional sites since the last MASG Newsletter was published in August 2007). By the end of September 2007, their combined geographical locations added up to an estimated contaminated area of 37.9 million square meters (15 square miles). This area is likely to continue to increase. Israel has yet to provide Lebanon with the exact strike data on the type, location and quantity of cluster munitions dropped during the 2006 conflict. Without this information, detailed parameters of the size and scope of the problem remain elusive, and operational planning is constantly being adjusted to meet the newly found reality on the ground.

From the time of the cessation of hostilities until end of September 2007, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre of South Lebanon coordinated the clearance of 40 percent of the surface and 20 percent of the subsurface. While 130,251 unexploded submunitions (cluster bomb units) have been destroyed, 32 percent of South Lebanon remains contaminated and claims new victims regularly. Since the ceasefire, 208 civilians have been killed or injured by cluster munitions. In the meantime, since the beginning of clearance operations in South Lebanon, several demining incidents have killed 12 deminers and injured 32 others.

Sudan. By the start of the rainy season, teams coordinated under the Mine Action Office of United Nations Mission in Sudan had made considerable progress and cleared 1,032 of the 2,366 dangerous areas identified to date and opened 21,133 kilometers (13,131 miles) of roads. With the onset of the rains, however, the focus turned to the recruitment and training of deminers and prioritization of routes and areas to be cleared in the dry season in collaboration with U.N. agencies, state governments, NGOs, UNMIS and the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur. During the reporting period, the in-country training and accreditation of the incoming demining teams of the five UNMIS military demining contingents following their annual rotations was completed, with all new teams now operational. UNMIS and UNICEF provided targeted mine-risk education to 166,992 people living in or intending to return to mine-affected areas, while landmine safety briefings were conducted for 804 United Nations and NGO personnel.

Darfur. Under the Security Council Resolution 1769 of July 2007, the United Nations African Union Mission in Darfur will provide technical mine-action advice and coordination and operational demining capacity to support the Darfur Peace Agreement. To support UNAMID, the mine-action component deployed to Darfur since 2004 will increase its current international staff by two, for a total of eight, and be supported by 22 national staff. New offices will be opened in Nyala and El Geinina, in addition to the existing office in El Fasher. As the major threat in Darfur is not landmines but ERW,² the main focus will be emergency route verification to support the deployment of UNAMID and movement of internally displaced persons and returnees; survey, explosive ordnance disposal and battle area clearance; and appropriate mine-risk education for affected communities.

MINE ACTION SUPPORT GROUP

Somalia. Following a recommendation from an interagency assessment mission to Somalia in June 2007, a program officer has been recruited by UNMAS to work on mine action within the UNDP Rule of Law and Security Programme for Somalia, based in Nairobi. This office is responsible for existing mine-action programs supported by UNDP in the Somaliland and Puntland regions of Somalia. The Terms of Reference of the program officer include preliminary planning for potential mine-action activities in south-central Somalia, fund raising and intermediating with African Union planning staff in Addis Ababa.

Update from UNDP

Algeria. UNDP contracted the French NGO Handicap International to conduct a mine-risk education needs assessment. This study will enable the mine-action program to identify the most at-risk population and to measure the level of awareness of the population and its behaviors in situations of risk. In addition, the study will identify the existing awareness means and the actors involved in sensitizing in order to better target the action.

Iraq. The Republic of Iraq acceded to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty³ on 15 August 2007, becoming the 155th State Party. The treaty entered into force on 1 February 2008. Iraq's initial transparency report required under Article 7⁴ is due no later than July 2008. Iraq's treaty-mandated deadline for the destruction of all stockpiled AP mines is 1 February 2012, and its deadline for destruction of all AP mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control is 1 February 2018.

The government took the decision to transfer the National Mine Action Authority from the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation to the Ministry of Environment. The handover process was slated to be completed by the end of November 2007.

A two-year U.N. joint project between UNDP and the World Health Organization on victim assistance in northern Iraq, funded by the government of Japan, was launched during September 2007 in Erbil. For the execution of the project, mainly national NGO partners are being used. The project will also revitalize the victim-assistance capacity that was developed under the United Nations Office of Project Services Mine Action Programme as part of the Oil for Food Programme that was closed in 2005 due to lack of funding.

Jordan. Key achievements in Jordan were as follows:

- The Wadi Araba project in the southern third of the country was completed ahead of schedule, with clearance activities concluded in late 2007. The National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation sampling teams have been working with Norwegian People's Aid, and the region was declared free of mines as of 1 February 2008. This means that NPA/NCDR has returned over seven million square meters (three square miles) of suspected hazardous area in two years. Some of the land is in the most intensive building/development areas in the country, with over US\$1 billion in investments going into areas where there were once minefields.
- Clearance along the last major remaining minefield running over 100 kilometers (62 miles) along the northern border began in October 2007.
- With technical assistance from UNICEF and funding from the United States, a targeted MRE program is now running in the border area of Mafraq.

Key objectives in Jordan included:

- Finish Jordan Valley by January 2008.
- Finish Wadi Araba by November 2007.
- Successfully support the Eighth Meeting of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty,⁴ including bringing in more representation from the region.

Key challenges in Jordan include:

- Northern Border Project: The complexity of the border and the fact that a replacement fence will need to be built in tandem with the actual demining will alter the project both from a management and a technical perspective.
 - UXO is causing more injuries than mines, and it is critical that a program is developed to find and remove them.
- Lebanon.** Key achievements in Lebanon were as follows:
- More than 126,000 cluster munitions bomblets have been cleared since the cessation of hostilities in August 2006. To date, 50 percent of the clearance has been achieved through national assets and the remainder through UNMAS or bilateral agreements. In addition, the United Arab Emirates provided the funding necessary to clear by the end of 2007 the remaining Israeli landmines in southern Lebanon left after the withdrawal of Israeli forces in 2000.
 - Through MRE and clearance, postwar mine victims were reduced by more than 15-fold over six months. It is estimated that the initial MRE multimedia campaign after the conflict, conducted with support of the National Steering Committee for MRE and UNICEF, reached over one million people. Lebanon Mine Action Center will coordinate MRE for the Nahr al-Bared crisis.
 - The Lebanese Mine Action Authority has decided to take full national ownership of mine-action management in Lebanon by the end of 2008, a change from the previous date of the end of 2007; this will include an independent quality-management system and national operations center for mine clearance.

The key objectives for Lebanon are clearance by December 2008 of all areas affected by the 2006 conflict and development of a nationally-executed program by the third quarter of 2008 with a focus on management capability and planning and including a phased exit strategy for the United Nations and other technical assistance.

Key challenges in Lebanon include:

- Mine action in Mount Lebanon and northern Lebanon has been placed on hold while national assets have been diverted to undertake clearances in southern Lebanon and the Nahr al-Bared camp.
- Development of a transition between a national/UNMAS program and a national program by the end of 2008.
- The Lebanese Armed Forces have been placed on increased operational stress due to the security situation in Lebanon and the 2007 crisis in northern Lebanon.

Funding for mine clearance outside of southern Lebanon remains low, and funding for mine-victims assistance projects remains critically low.

Mauritania. Key achievements in Mauritania were as follows:

- The National Humanitarian Demining Programme for Development was transferred to the Ministry of Decentralization and Territorial Management effective 21 August 2007, providing greater visibility and transparency to mine action activities.
- A national mine-action strategy has been developed, based on Landmine Impact Survey results, to achieve Ottawa Treaty obligations by January 2011.
- Funding from the U.S. Department of Defense enabled the design and production of MRE material which was distributed in November 2007. Key objectives in Mauritania included:
- Implementing 2007-funded mine-action activities.
- Conduct workshop for national strategy.

The key challenge in Mauritania is to address funding shortfalls outlined in the national strategy.

Uganda. Key achievements in Uganda were as follows:

- The Comprehensive Victim Assistance Planning Conference (the first in an African country) was successfully completed.

The Strategic Plan for Victim Assistance was completed. This Plan was presented during the Eighth Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty in November 2007 by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

Technical survey/EOD/clearance operations were completed in 36 hazardous areas. Key objectives in Uganda include:

- Four additional multi-purpose demining teams are to be deployed (splitting existing teams).
- MRE, paramedic, team leader, quality assurance/quality control and post-clearance survey training are to be conducted.
- The project document for national execution of the mine-action program by the Office of Personnel Management and UNDP are to be signed.
- The Landmine Survivor Surveillance Network database is to be field-tested.
- Targeted needs assessment in the Acholi subregion is to be completed.
- Preparations for the deployment of a mine-detection dog component in cooperation with NPA are to be completed.

Key challenges in Uganda include:

- The return of IDPs is proceeding, and there is an ongoing, urgent need for mine-action operations as a prerequisite to respond to a safe and protected return process.
- There is a risk of segregation in northern Uganda affecting landmine survivors with disabilities.
- There was no extension of the Victim Assistance Advisor's contract, although an extension to the end of 2008 was highly recommended by the government, U.N. Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery missions and external mine-action evaluators and related funds were pledged by the government of Norway.

Update from UNICEF

Bosnia and Herzegovina. With UNICEF support in August, the Bosnia Herzegovina Mine Action Center organized a three-day workshop for the revision of the BiH Mine Action Strategy 2004–2008, including MRE and landmine victim-assistance sub-strategies and preparations for the new 2009–2019 Mine Action Strategy. The objectives of the new strategies were defined, including strategic and operational goals and the financial plan.

From September, with UNICEF's support, the local NGO Genesis Project, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, started implementation of a new project on landmine and small-arms risk education and Participatory Action Research on SA in eight locations. By the end of 2007, the project trained 100 schoolteachers on sustainable MRE and SA risk education; 100 children directly and 700 children indirectly received knowledge on landmine risk and MRE peer-education methodology. The Participatory Action Research on small arms will result in the finalization and implementation of three small arms action plans based on recommendations from children from the previous school semester in three BiH communities.

Cambodia. In Cambodia, UNICEF is continuing to provide financial and technical support to the mine-action sector for national MRE coordination through the Cambodian Mine Action/Victim Assistance Authority, and community-based mine risk reduction. They continue to endorse the mass media campaign through the Cambodian Mine Action Centre and school-based MRE for children through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. MRE materials are also provided to different MRE operators. Prostheses, wheelchairs and other mobility devices, as well as rehabilitation assistance for children and women victims of landmines, UXO and other causes of disabilities, also continued with the support of UNICEF.

In August 2006, 39 new casualties were reported by the Cambodia Mine/UXO Victim Information System. This indicates an increase of 12 casualties in August 2007, to a total of 51. Of these, 58 percent were men, 29 percent were children under 18 years of age and 7 percent were women; 57 percent of the victims were injured or killed by UXO and 43 percent by mines. For activities, 50 percent of the victims were injured or killed while tampering with UXO and 8 percent were injured or killed at the time of farming; 7 percent of official deminers were injured or killed while demining. Between January and September 2007, the number of casualties was 281. This shows a decrease of 78 casualties, compared with the same period in 2006 (359).

Chad. In Chad, UNICEF continued its lead role for MRE, providing coordination, technical and financial support to the government's National High Commission for Demining.

In 2007, the total number of mine/UXO casualties reported from January to September reached 182. This represents 25 percent more than the total of all casualties for 2006.

In 2007, the casualty figures are as follows:

- Civilian: 96.2 percent
- Military: 3.9 percent

- Child victims: 81.3 percent
- Adult victims: 18.7 percent
- Killed: 28 percent (with 84 percent being children)
- Victims maimed: 32 percent (with 29 percent being children)
- UXO incidents: 96.7 percent
- Mines incidents: 3.3 percent

Sudan. During the third quarter of 2007, UNICEF, in collaboration with the National Mine Action Center and South Sudan Demining Commission, implemented a range of MRE activities throughout the country. These included support to NGOs for the implementation of direct MRE sessions to at-risk populations including IDPs, returnees and local communities. Forty MRE teams from eight different NGOs operated in IDP camps, returnee way stations and affected communities, reaching 177,334 persons with MRE.

In addition, UNICEF, in collaboration with the NMAC and the Ministry of Education in the three states of Kassala, Blue Nile and South Kordofan, implemented a school-based MRE project. ♦

See Endnotes, page 112



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