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## The Israeli Defense Force's Humanitarian Demining Efforts

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# The Israeli Defense Force's

## Humanitarian Demining Efforts



### Introduction

The Israel Defense Force (IDF) Engineering Corps is the mine action center of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Currently, IDF is engaged in various activities in response to the Palestinian terror campaign and does not have the resources to participate in international demining programs.<sup>2</sup> However, the Israeli government views the issue of international cooperation in the areas of mine clearance, mine awareness and mine victim rehabilitation to be of major importance, despite the difficult budgetary sit-

uation. In addition, IDF continues to prioritize mine action internally.<sup>3</sup>

### Internal Humanitarian Demining Efforts

All minefields and areas contaminated by UXO are defined as military closed areas; therefore, the IDF Engineering Corps is responsible for any activities on mined territory.<sup>4</sup> The IDF policy is based on the removal of outdated mines and other munitions. IDF continues to verify the marking and fencing of minefields and suspected areas in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II, which restrict the use of mines, booby traps and other devices. The renewal of fences and markings, where necessary, is carried out within the context of the IDF's verification activities.<sup>3</sup>

The 2003 *Landmine Monitor Report*, produced by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), reports that in November 2002, Israel disclosed its annual program to destroy outdated mines and stated that no new minefields were put in place within the year. As a follow-up on this statement, in February of 2003, Israel reported that 12 tons of mines were destroyed in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

### Recording Measures

During 2003, the IDF began working to improve the recording measures of several minefields and suspected areas via the use of specific global positioning systems (GPS) and other equipment. This equipment will assist in the management and control of minefields and will enable the Israeli Mapping Center (IMC) to update maps with more accurate locations of minefields.<sup>5</sup>

### Legislation

Israel has not enacted any additional domestic legislation to implement the provisions of Amended Protocol II.<sup>4</sup> Israel maintains that the existing Israeli legislation enables the government to implement the provisions of Amended Protocol II without the need for additional legislation. This legislation includes, inter alia, export control legislation covering all defense equipment, know-how and technology. There are also IDF regulations and orders concerning marking, fencing and monitoring as well as demining and disposing of mines, booby-traps and other devices.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent to Israel's ratification of Amended Protocol II, measures were taken to ensure that the relevant authorities in the IDF were cognizant of the provisions of the Protocol and their implications. In addition, IDF instructions and operating procedures are regularly reviewed to verify their compatibility with the provisions of Amended Protocol II.<sup>3</sup>

The IDF Engineering Corps maintains a set of detailed regulations and instructions regarding the management of archives and the recording of minefields and mined areas. Moreover, the IDF School of Military Law (responsible for the dissemination of the laws of war within the IDF) includes the provisions of the CCW and Amended Protocol II as part of their curriculum. In addition, lectures concerning the conventions and protocol are provided on a regular basis to commanders of the IDF Engineering Corps.<sup>3</sup>

### Public Information

Information provided for the general population regarding Israel's status vis-à-vis Amended Protocol II was disseminated upon

Israel's ratification of the Protocol. To prevent any accidental entry into potentially dangerous areas, warning signs in three languages (Hebrew, Arabic and English) are clearly positioned on the perimeter of the minefields.<sup>3</sup>

Organizers of field trips (conducted by schools, youth movements, workplaces and private citizens) are obligated to coordinate their route with the relevant IDF Area Command. In this context, field trip organizers are briefed as to the location of minefields situated in the area (or suspected areas that are treated as mined until cleared and verified) and are given the appropriate mine awareness instructions.<sup>7</sup>

Commercially available land maps, issued by the IMC, contain clear markings regarding the location of minefields. The maps are periodically updated by the IMC based on information available to the IDF.<sup>7</sup>

### Criticism of Israel's Internal Humanitarian Demining Efforts

Israel has been criticized for abstaining from voting on every annual pro-landmine ban UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution since 1996, including UNGA Resolution 57/74 in November 2002.<sup>4</sup> Israel responded by stating that it views landmines as weapons that should be carefully restricted, but not totally banned, as they are often necessary to prevent aggression and attack, particularly given the threatening environment in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The *Landmine Monitor Report* cites the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF's) assessment of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). In its report UNICEF states:

"Minefields dating from the 1967 Middle East war, located in the first defense line between Jordan and the West Bank, are mostly not properly fenced or marked. Israeli military training zones either are not properly fenced or not fenced at all and UXO is not collected after the end of training. Many of these training zones are situated near populated areas; as a result, civilians come into contact with UXO easily. In addition to that, in most areas of confrontation Israeli and Palestinian UXO and IED are left behind."<sup>4</sup>

Israel maintains that within its borders all minefields are fenced and registered and are updated on a timely basis by the IDF and the National Mapping Authority.<sup>4</sup>

### Maavarim: An Israeli Demining Company

Companies like Maavarim complete mine clearance projects within Israel for civilian purposes. However, the IDF Engineering Corps is required to be involved in any contract to remove landmines/UXO within Israel. Like every mine action center (MAC), IDF Engineering Corps has its specific procedures beyond the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). IDF requires any organizations that complete demining in Israel to adhere to their procedures. For example, a different type of minefield marking, different lane width and much stricter safety procedures are required. They check the organizations' plans and approve them. They are responsible for external quality assurance. They also monitor handover procedures.<sup>1</sup>

At present, Maavarim is involved in a 2–3 month project in Ramat Hovav for the Industrial Council of Ramat Hovav. The project aims to clear an area that was a fire zone in southern Israel, near Beer-Sheva. The area, contaminated with UXO, will be cleared for development.<sup>1</sup>

Maavarim, in conjunction with the Turkish company ARMADA and others, is also in the process of planning to clear mines along the border to allow the area to be used for agriculture. During 2003, Maavarim checked suspected areas for the Jordan Gates Project. The project will establish a free trade area.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, Maavarim has contributed to international mine clearing efforts: Maavarim experts conducted mine awareness workshops for Kosovo refugees in Albania prior to their return home.<sup>3</sup> In 2002, Maavarim cleared 700,000 sq m, including a railway station in Sunja and a main road in Sibenik, in a World Bank-funded project in Croatia.<sup>4</sup>

### International Humanitarian Demining Efforts

During 1995–2001, Israel, in conjunction with UNICEF, participated in a mine awareness project conducted in Angola. The project was established to educate the local population in various regions of the country about the hazards of mines. Israeli involvement in this project increased during 2002 when four Israeli volunteers, financially sponsored by the GOI (government of Israel), operated in the area.<sup>3</sup>

In 1997, Israel conducted a joint mine clearance project with Jordan in the Arava Valley to allow for agricultural use of

the area.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, Israel, Jordan, Canada and Norway participated in a quadrilateral project aimed at mine clearance in the Jordan Valley and medical rehabilitation for Jordanian mine victims. As part of the quadrilateral effort, Israel organized and hosted a workshop on the rehabilitation of mine victims in April 1998.<sup>3</sup>

### Rehabilitation Programs

Israel offers treatment and rehabilitation to Israeli citizens and to residents of the Mediterranean region.<sup>3</sup> The Israeli medical establishment treats and rehabilitates individuals who have lost their limbs or have suffered multi-system injuries as a

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result of landmines, UXO, IED and other devices.<sup>8</sup>

The *Landmine Monitor* reports that, in recent years, Israeli rehabilitation specialists were sent, under the auspices of the United Nations and Israeli Foreign Ministry, to Sri Lanka, Vietnam, El Salvador, Croatia and Slovenia. Israel also has a rehabilitation exchange agreement with Armenia, Cyprus, Greece and the former Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> The *Landmine Monitor*

*Report* also mentioned that the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004) in an economic rehabilitation program in Guatemala. The microfinance program seeks to encourage landmine survivors to start their own business.<sup>4</sup>

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4. "Israel" International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Landmine Monitor Report 2003: <<http://www.icbl.org/lm/2003/israel.html>> (6 March 2004).

5. In this context, updated information, which specified the exact location of minefields and suspected areas closed by the IDF, was provided to local municipalities and other interested establishments. *Israel: National Annual Report*. Geneva, November 2003.

6. It should also be noted that Israel has extended its unilateral moratorium on export of all anti-personnel landmines for an additional three years (until July 2005). *Israel: National Annual Report*. Geneva, November 2003.

7. The IDF/ Engineering HQ updates the IMC on a quarterly basis. *Israel: National Annual Report*. Geneva, November 2003.

8. The primary Israeli hospitals and rehabilitation centers active in the facilitation of comprehensive rehabilitation are "Tel Hashomer" ("Shiba") and "Lowenstein" in Tel Aviv, and "Rambam," and "Benei Zion" in Haifa. *Israel: National Annual Report*. Geneva, November 2003.

\* Photos c/o AP.

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