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Red Cross/Red Crescent Mine Action Involvement in the Middle East

The Middle East is an area significantly impacted by landmines, and there is a great need for the spread of mine awareness in mine-affected countries. The Red Cross and Red Crescent are hard at work in the region, attempting to raise mine awareness among the citizens of these nations.

■ Orthopedic Center



Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the local authorities, and steps have been taken since 1998 to deal with the problem. However, only since Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, which it occupied for 22 years, has this deadly legacy of war attracted widespread public attention, both in Lebanon and abroad.

The formerly occupied territory is one of the most badly contaminated areas in the country. One week after the withdrawal of Israeli forces, seven mine/

The main danger for society comes from anti-personnel mines and UXO, especially cluster-bomb submunitions, though the threat posed by anti-tank mines, roadside bombs and booby-traps should not be underestimated. The most severely affected areas are those along the former front lines along the border with Israel and in and around former military positions. Parts of the Bekaa valley, Mount Lebanon and some areas in northern Lebanon are contaminated as well.

Both adults and children have been seen walking in and around military installations, sightseeing and collecting "souvenirs." Since many of these people come from outside the formerly occupied territory and since other parts of Lebanon are contaminated as well, the ICRC/LRC mine awareness program must be implemented throughout the whole country.

ICRC/LRC Awareness-Raising Program

In the summer of 2000, the ICRC trained 12 mine awareness instructors. Their role is to train LRC activists in turn. The 12 came from all over the country, but mainly (seven of them) from the severely affected south: Zahrani, Nabatiye, Sidon, Marjiyoun/Hasbaiya, Tyre and Bent-Jbail. Others came from Machghara (in the western Bekaa Valley), Alay (Mount Lebanon), Zahle/Baalbek (in

UXO accidents occurred in which five people were killed. A further 13 were injured, four of whom had to have amputations. This alarming news prompted national and international organizations and agencies to step up their mine/UXO-related activities, a process in which the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) was involved from the start. Since June 2000, the ICRC has been helping to build up the LRC's capacity by training its staff and producing mine awareness materials.

by Laurence Desvignes, ICRC

Lebanon

Background

Over decades of conflict, thousands of antipersonnel landmines were laid in the soil of Lebanon where, together with untold quantities of UXO, they continue to pose a grave threat to people's lives and health. This threat has always been of serious concern to the International



■ (Left) Workers inspect materials in a Palestinian Red Crescent ambulance.

■ (Right) A delegation of the ICRC gathering information from the Bedouins near Taybeh.

the northern Bekaa Valley), Batroun (in northern Lebanon) and Beirut.

Activities Past and Present

During the "emergency phase," the period following the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, brochures, stickers and posters were distributed on the roads leading south. It is estimated that around 200,000 people were reached in this way.

Material was prepared for presentations to school children, as was a training curriculum for use in workshops to be organized for various groups. A poster and a leaflet for children were printed in large numbers and distributed. Mine awareness sessions were organized in summer camps, reaching a total of 1,000 children. LRC mine/UXO-awareness instructors also made 125 presentations to over 5,800 adults.

In 2001, the LRC organized a training workshop for 15 mine/UXO-awareness activists from the Faculty of Public Health at the Lebanese University.

Future Plans

The ICRC and the LRC are promoting an integrated community-based approach to the problem, in which raising mine/UXO awareness is linked to survey/markings/clearance operations and humanitarian work in general. In that regard, the ICRC and the LRC are building cooperation with mine-clearance agencies, such as the Swiss Federation for Mine Clearance, which should, in the future, detect and clear mines and UXO in affected

areas. At the same time, ways are being sought to link the communities concerned with humanitarian organizations in such a way that the communities' subsistence needs are met by the humanitarian community, thus eliminating the motivation for risk-taking behavior.

However, such an approach requires that mine awareness instructors focus on adults and that information be exchanged between the instructors and the affected communities (the instructors drawing attention to the danger and supplying information on clearance, while the affected communities inform them about factors such as economic conditions that may aggravate the problem). Much remains to be done to develop this aspect of the ICRC-supported program.

Additionally, a puppet-theatre play is planned for the children in the affected areas. The play will be recorded on video for use during other presentations to children.

Southern Iraq

A survey was carried out in southern Iraq in the summer of 2001 to assess the mine/UXO threat and determine the need to raise awareness. The mission identified the main problem as cluster bombs and other UXO dropped during the Second Gulf War. Many shepherds, including children, are being injured or killed since they do not always know about the danger or do not take the necessary precautions.

In order to respond to immediate needs and mobilize both the local authorities and the population regarding the dangers posed by UXO and cluster bombs, the ICRC organized four mine/UXO-awareness days in three of the affected southern governorates in April 2001.

Constituting the first steps in a comprehensive mine/UXO-awareness program, each day consisted of two plays, a lecture by civil defense personnel on the various types of mines and UXO, first-aid training by the Iraqi Red Crescent Society, a presentation of ICRC limb-fitting and rehabilitation work in Iraq, videos on the mine/UXO problem, accounts by victim and speeches from the local authorities. Some 1,700 people attended these events.

The involvement of the respective governors, as well as of the officials from the civil defense organization, the education and health departments, the police and the Iraqi Red Crescent was crucial for the success of these events and for the mobilization of the authorities regarding the UXO issue.

The civil defense organization is also involved in clearance and awareness-raising activities, though on a limited scale since it lacks equipment and technical support. The ICRC has asked the authorities for permission to launch a comprehensive UXO-awareness program in southern Iraq. It is strongly committed to developing the activity in close cooperation with the authorities, the Iraqi Red Crescent and other relevant partners, including the civil defense organization.

Middle East

Jordan

A mission was conducted in Jordan in summer 2001 to determine whether mine awareness activities should be initiated and/or supported by the delegation and how this should be done. The Royal Corps of Engineers of the Jordan Armed Forces organized two one-day field trips to some of the affected areas, demining operations and cleared areas in the Jordan Valley. A series of meetings were also held in Amman, mainly with members of the National Demining and Rehabilitation Committee (NDC), the Jordan Red Crescent, the Landmine Survivors Network (LSN), the Civil Defense and UNICEF.

Data collection

Data on mine/UXO casualties has been gathered by various bodies (medical facilities, the LSN, etc.), but not on a systematic basis. As a result, there is no comprehensive figure on the number of casualties in Jordan. Thus, it is crucial to organize a data collection system so that the extent of the problem can be assessed and mine-related activities can be better targeted.

Mine/UXO Awareness Activities

The Jordan Armed Forces and the Civil Defense have carried out mine

awareness activities on an ad hoc basis with some coordination between them, but there is no specific training program in this area. Moreover, the approach taken and the messages delivered have not been adapted to the various target groups (children, farmers, shepherds, city dwellers, etc.) and geographical areas (Jordan Valley, Syrian border, northern and southern parts of the Israeli border) involved.

According to the results of the ICRC assessment mission, mine awareness activities should be developed on a limited scale according to the needs of affected communities. Possible ICRC involvement in mine/UXO awareness activities would take the form of support for the Jordan Red Crescent network; however, the decision regarding ICRC involvement will depend on the situation in the region next year and on the project proposal being prepared by the Jordan Red Crescent.

The basic principles for ICRC support would be as follows:

- Data on mine/UXO casualties would be gathered at the national level by the NDC together with other organizations including the Jordan Red Crescent. As it has done elsewhere, the ICRC could assist in providing the needed training and in promoting the use of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) standard form (to be adapted to local needs).

- An assessment would be made of perceptions, attitudes and risky behavior in affected communities in order to determine more precisely what messages should be delivered to what target groups, and where the message should be delivered. The ICRC could also assist in conducting

the assessment.

- Once staff members of the Jordan Red Crescent and other organizations have been trained, the idea would be Basra, orthopedic center to initiate local mine awareness projects according to the needs of affected communities (e.g., billboards for shepherds, plays for children, leaflets or posters specifically designed for certain areas, etc.).

- Support for mine awareness activities of the Jordan Armed Forces and the Civil Defense could also be planned, specifically with regard to the production of materials. However, the type of materials to be produced and the messages to be included would also depend on the results of the assessment (i.e., what message for what target group?).

Conclusion

ICRC is lending its support to a number of Middle Eastern nations with the hopes of increasing mine awareness as much as possible in the region. In addition to its country programs, the ICRC will hold a mine-action workshop in Amman in 2002 for all ICRC and National Society staff members involved in mine/UXO-awareness programs worldwide. ICRC has already made a significant impact on mine-affected countries, and hopefully it will be able to continue making a difference in years to come. ■

**All photos courtesy of ICRC*

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