



# SYRIA

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Syria should ensure that its armed forces do not use cluster munitions.
- Other states engaged in the armed conflicts in Syria should ensure that their armed forces and any armed groups they support do not use cluster munitions.
- Syria should accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) as a matter of priority.
- Syria should initiate survey and clearance of cluster munition remnants (CMR) as soon as possible and take other measures to protect civilians from explosive remnants of war (ERW).

## CONTAMINATION

CMR contamination in Syria is the consequence of ongoing armed conflicts since 2012. Syrian government forces have used cluster munitions extensively in the four-year-old conflict while Islamic State (IS) has reportedly used them in a number of instances, but the extent of contamination is not known.

In 2014, Human Rights Watch reported that it had identified 224 separate locations in 10 of Syria's 14 governorates that had been attacked with cluster munitions by the Syrian government, many of them more than once.<sup>1</sup> Use continued in 2015 and 2016. Between 30 September (when Syria and Russia began a joint military offensive) and 14 December 2015, cluster munitions were reportedly used on at least 20 occasions. At least 35 civilians, including five women and seventeen children, were killed, and dozens more were injured by cluster munitions, according to a report by Human Rights Watch.<sup>2</sup> In January and February 2016, the Syrian-Russian joint military operation included use of cluster bombs in at least 14 attacks that killed or injured dozens of civilians.<sup>3</sup>

### Other ERW and Landmines

According to the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), contamination from the armed conflicts include landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), artisanal mines, some of which are connected to booby traps, and other ERW.<sup>4</sup> In Kobani, an April 2015 assessment by Handicap International found that the level of weapons contamination in the city centre was extremely high: an average of 10 pieces of munitions per square metre.<sup>5</sup>

## PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

There is no national mine action programme in Syria, no national mine action authority, and no mine action centre.

On the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014), UNMAS was asked to provide assistance for mine action in Syria. UNMAS deployed a team to southern Turkey in August 2015. In addition to coordinating mine action operations, UNMAS has supported direct implementation of survey and clearance activities.<sup>6</sup>

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## LAND RELEASE

Syria does not have an active civilian programme for survey or clearance of CMR as a result of generalised violence and ongoing armed conflicts. UNMAS reported in early 2016 that conflict in many governorates has prevented access by mine action organisations. The extent and impact of contamination has resulted in Syrians without formal training conducting “ad hoc clearance without the technical ability to do so. The capacity of some local teams conducting clearance has been reduced by half as a result of casualties occurring during operations.”<sup>7</sup>

Russian deminers arrived in Syria in March 2016. In April, the Russian military reported completing demining of the ancient part of the city of Palmyra, recaptured by Syrian and Russian forces in late March from IS militants.<sup>8</sup>

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## ARTICLE 4 COMPLIANCE

Syria is not a state party or signatory to the CCM. Nonetheless, it has obligations under international human rights law to clear CMR as soon as possible, in particular by virtue of its duty to protect the right to life of every person under its jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup>

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- 1 Human Rights Watch, “Technical Briefing Note: Use of cluster munitions in Syria”, 4 April 2014. The governorates were Aleppo, Damascus City and Rural Damascus, Daraa, Deir al-Zour, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Latakia, and Raqqa.
  - 2 Human Rights Watch, “Russia/Syria: Extensive Recent Use of Cluster Munitions. Indiscriminate Attacks despite Syria’s Written Guarantees”, 20 December 2015, at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/20/russia/syria-extensive-recent-use-cluster-munitions>.
  - 3 Cluster Munition Coalition, “The injured were mostly women and children”, 8 February 2016, at: <http://www.stopclustermunitions.org/en-gb/media/news/2016/russia-syria-cluster-bomb-attacks-feb-2016.aspx>.
  - 4 UNMAS, “Programmes: Syria”, last updated March 2016, at: <http://www.mineaction.org/programmes/syria>.
  - 5 HI, “Kobani: A city of rubble and unexploded devices”, Factsheet, May 2015, at: [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/handicapinternational/pages/2015/attachments/original/1432650458/May\\_2015\\_Syria\\_Kobani\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf?1432650458](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/handicapinternational/pages/2015/attachments/original/1432650458/May_2015_Syria_Kobani_Fact_Sheet.pdf?1432650458).
  - 6 UNMAS, “Programmes: Syria”, Last updated March 2016.
  - 7 Ibid.
  - 8 “Russia completes demining of archaeological site in Palmyra, Syria”, *Euronews*, 22 April 2016, at: <http://www.euronews.com/2016/04/21/russia-completes-demining-of-archeological-site-in-palmyra-syria/>.
  - 9 Syria is a state party to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 6(1) of which stipulates that: “Every human being has the inherent right to life”.