



EGYPT

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Egypt should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Egypt should report meaningfully on the clearance that is being undertaken and seek to undertake a comprehensive baseline survey of anti-personnel mine contamination.

CONTAMINATION

Egypt is contaminated with mines in the Western Desert, which date from the Second World War, and in the Sinai Peninsula and Eastern Desert, which are a legacy of wars with Israel between 1956 and 1973. Some recent mine incidents in Sinai may have been caused by mines emplaced by anti-government jihadist groups.¹ It was reported in August 2016 that Islamic State had been digging up Second World War-era landmines and re-using them.² The precise extent of contamination across the country remains unknown and past estimates have been unreliable.

Most of the Western Desert contamination occurred around the location of Second World War battles that took place between the Quattara depression and Alamein on the Mediterranean coast. Other affected areas lie around the city of Marsa Matrouh and at Sallum near the Libyan border. In November 2016, during a ceremony to mark the opening of a new prosthetic limb centre, the United Kingdom's Ambassador to Egypt announced that all the maps of minefields laid by British and Allied forces during World War II had been handed over.³ According to the head of the military engineering department, though, the British minefield maps were "sketch maps" and most

of the mines were buried randomly. In January 2018, the British MP Daniel Kawczynski put a written question to the UK Secretary of State for International Development asking whether her Department was taking steps to assist with the mapping and disposal of Second World War mines in the Tobruk and El Alamein regions. The UK reiterated that maps of minefield locations had been provided to the Egyptian authorities and that, since 2006, through multilateral funding along with other donors (including Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States), the United Kingdom had funded clearance of 130,446 acres of land around El Alamein.⁴

The Egyptian government has claimed that some 17 million mines remained in the Western Desert and another 5.5 million in Sinai and the Eastern Desert.⁵ In an April 2009 assessment, though, the United Nations (UN) Mine Action Team cautioned that data needed careful analysis to avoid reporting areas that had already been cleared and thereby misrepresenting the problem.⁶ In this regard, in October 2017, it was reported by the European Union (EU)'s ambassador to Egypt that 2,680km² of land in the North West Coast was estimated to still be contaminated.⁷

In August 2010, the Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast (Executive Secretariat) reported to donors that the army had destroyed 2.9 million mines while clearing 38km² in five areas, leaving “more than 16 million mines” covering an estimated area of 248km².⁸ Details of items cleared are not consistent with other available information.

In 2013, the army handed over to the Ministries of Housing and of Planning and International Cooperation an area of some 105km² in the Western Desert, which it had reportedly cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Details of clearance operations were not reported. Minister of Housing Tarek Wafiq was quoted as saying that with completion of the project one-fifth of the Western Desert had been cleared.⁹

In August 2016, it was reported that Islamic State had been harvesting the explosives from World War II mines still uncleared in Egypt. According to Ambassador Fathy el-Shazly, formerly the head of Egypt’s Executive Secretariat for Mine Clearance, “We’ve had at least 10 reports from the military of terrorists using old mines. Even now, these things trouble us in different ways.”¹⁰ These findings were reiterated in June

2017 at a UN Security Council briefing when Egypt’s permanent representative to the UN Amr Abdel-Latif Abul Atta stated that “abandoned mines and explosive remnants of wars have become a source of access for armed movements and terrorists to find materials for manufacturing improvised explosive devices”.¹¹ It was reported in January 2018 that Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (ABM), which pledged allegiance to Islamic State in 2014, has been using old mines and caches of explosives left in Sinai to produce different types of explosive devices. There were at least five major attacks by terrorist groups using such devices in Egypt in 2017.¹² This should serve as a wake-up call to Egypt to pursue mine clearance with far greater vigour than it has so far done so.

In March 2017, the Landmines in Africa blog reported that three people were killed and two injured when their car hit a landmine in central Sinai; that one person was killed and four injured by an anti-personnel mine in Suez; and that two people were killed by a landmine in a village near the border with Israel in northern Sinai.¹³ In contrast, it was reported in October 2017, by General Fathy Mansour, Deputy Commander of the Egyptian Military Engineering Corps, that there had been just one casualty from a landmine in El Alamein in 2017.¹⁴

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

In 2017 as in previous years, the mine action programme in Egypt was not functioning effectively.

In November 2006, the Egyptian government and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) agreed a project: “Support the North West Coast Development Plan and Mine Action Programme: Mine Action”. The project provided for creation of an Executive Secretariat for Mine Clearance and the Development of the North West Coast within the Ministry of Planning to coordinate implementation of the North West Coast Development Plan through a partnership consisting of the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Defence, and UNDP. The project foresaw demining based on humanitarian and development needs, mine risk education, and assistance to mine victims.¹⁵

The project was to be conducted in two phases lasting about 18 months each. The first phase concluded in 2014. In October 2014, the EU agreed to support the second phase of the project, targeting clearance of 332km².¹⁶ In May 2015, the Director of the Executive Secretariat acknowledged that past results had been “disappointing”. That month, however, UNDP and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided EGP13.8 million (approx. US\$1.77 million) while the EU provided €4.7 million to support a second phase of the national demining and development programme in the North-West Coast area which ended in 2017.¹⁷ It was reported that a total area of 1,096 km² has been “cleared” since the beginning of the project in 2009 and that there are plans to establish an eco-oriented city, the “New City of Alamein”.¹⁸ Funding was also used for capacity building, establishing a quality management unit, and supporting the creation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database.

Clearance was conducted using both manual and mechanical demining techniques. The Executive Secretariat is said to have procured 461 mine detectors, 355 demining suits and protective helmets, one Casspir armoured vehicle with the “Mine Lab” detecting device, and five Armtrac vehicles.¹⁹ In August 2017, it was reported that negotiations had begun on a third phase of the project to allocate \$5 million to clear the rest of the northern coast and the Sinai Peninsula.²⁰

In January 2017, Egypt’s Minister of International Cooperation Sahar Nasr announced the establishment of the National Centre for Landmine Action and Sustainable Development. Minister Nasr said that the centre would begin clearing 600km² in the northern coast and would also establish infrastructure after clearance was completed.²¹

In May 2017, Kuwait granted Egypt an aid package of almost US\$1 million for mine clearance in the North-West Coast area.²²

Operators

Mine clearance in Egypt is conducted by the Egyptian Army Corps of Engineers, part of the Egyptian armed forces.

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) provides support to the Executive Secretariat and the Army Corps of Engineers in information management and operations. This support includes revision and introduction of national standard operating procedures for mine action in 2014, advice on land release methodology and techniques, and assistance to UNDP in improving mechanical mine action.²³

As noted above, UNDP is a partner in Egypt’s national demining and development programme.

LAND RELEASE

Egypt has not reported with any credibility on its release of mined areas in recent years.

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Egypt is not a state party to the APMB, but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires the clearance of mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.

- 1 "Sinai landmine kills three soldiers", *News24*, 9 March 2015, at: <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Sinai-landmine-kills-3-soldiers-20150309>.
- 2 P. Schwartzstein, "ISIS Is Digging Up Nazi Land Mines in Egypt", *Newsweek*, 10 August 2016, at: <http://europe.newsweek.com/isis-hitler-islamic-state-egypt-world-war-ii-land-mines-jihad-bombs-explosives-488927?rm=eu>.
- 3 A. Nayder, "Helping Landmine Victims in Marsa Matrouh-And Preventing More", *Because*, 3 November 2016, at: <http://because.bz/health/helping-landmine-victims-marsa-matrouh-and-preventing-more>.
- 4 Egypt and Libya: Land Mines: Written question – 122961, 16 January 2018, at: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-01-16/122961/>.
- 5 State Information Services, "Landmines in Egypt", 20 July 2009; Mohamed Abdel Salam, "First phase of demining in Egypt complete", *Bikyamasr* (blog), 18 April 2010.
- 6 UN Mine Action Team, "Egypt Mine Action Inter-agency Assessment", 14–18 April 2009, p. 11.
- 7 "Egypt battles landmines 75 years after El Alamein", *Agence France-Presse*, 28 October 2017, at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/egypt-battles-landmines-75-years-after-el-alamein-1.670975>.
- 8 "Egypt Mine Action Project Northwest Coast: Phase I Accomplishments", Presentation by Amb. Fathy El Shazly, Director, Executive Secretariat, Cairo, August 2010.
- 9 N. al Behairy, "20% of the Sahara in West Egypt cleared of landmines", *Daily News*, 20 March 2013.
- 10 P. Schwartzstein, "ISIS Is Digging Up Nazi Landmines From World War 2 As Explosives", *Newsweek*, 10 August 2016.
- 11 UN Security Council meeting, UN doc. SC/12866, 13 June 2017, at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12866.doc.htm>.
- 12 "How Egyptian security dealt with IEDs threat?", *Egypt Today*, 1 January 2018, at: <http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/38996/How-Egyptian-security-dealt-with-IEDs-threat>.
- 13 "Three civilians killed in land mine explosion in central Sinai", *Ahram Online*, 20 March 2017, at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/261324/Egypt/Politics-/Three-civilians-killed-in-land-mine-explosion-in-c.aspx>; "One dead, four injured as wartime land mine explodes in Egypt's Suez", *Ahram Online*, 16 March 2017, at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/261050/Egypt/Politics-/One-dead,-four-injured-as-wartime-land-mine-explod.aspx>.
- 14 "Egypt battles landmines 75 years after El Alamein", *Agence France-Presse*, 28 October 2017, at: <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/egypt-battles-landmines-75-years-after-el-alamein-1.670975>.
- 15 UNDP, "Support to the North West Coast Development and Mine Action Plan", undated.
- 16 UNDP, "EU and UNDP celebrate the launch of the second phase of the project to help develop the North West Coast and mine action", Press release, 24 October 2014.
- 17 M. Samir, "UNDP, USAID provide EGP 13.8m for WWII landmines clearance programme", *Daily News Egypt*, 20 May 2015, at: <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2015/05/20/correction-undp-usaid-provide-egp-13-8m-for-wwii-landmines-clearance-programme/>.
- 18 European Commission "Joint Staff Working Document 2018: The European Union's Support for Mine Action across the World", 14 February 2018, p.23
- 19 See: <http://mineaction.org/demining/>.
- 20 "Egypt to invest \$17.5M in Anti-Mines Action Project", *APA News*, 11 August 2017, at: <http://apanews.net/index.php/en/news/egypt-to-invest-175m-in-anti-mines-action-project>.
- 21 H. Salah, "Establishment of National Center for Mines Action and Sustainable Development completed: Nasr", *Daily News Egypt*, 23 January 2017, at: <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2017/01/23/612214/>.
- 22 "Kuwait provides KWD 300,000 to help clear landmines from Egypt's north coast", *Ahram Online*, 8 May 2017, at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/268345.aspx>.
- 23 GICHD, "Where we work: Egypt", June 2015, at: <http://www.gichd.org/where-we-work/egypt/#.Vx-ueCnmrX4>.