

# EGYPT



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Egypt should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Egypt should commit to developing a functioning civilian mine action programme and seek international technical assistance to this end.

## CONTAMINATION

Egypt is contaminated with mines in the Western Desert, which date from World War II, 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.<sup>1</sup> It was reported in August 2016 that Islamic State had been digging up World War II-era landmines and reusing them.<sup>2</sup> The precise extent of contamination across the country remains unknown and past estimates have been unreliable.

Most of the Western Desert contamination occurs around the location of World War II battles that took place between the Quattara depression and Alamein on the Mediterranean coast. 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.<sup>3</sup> 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. The year 2017 saw the 75th anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein on 23 October–11 November 1942, which was a decisive battle of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Other affected areas lie around the city of Marsa Matrouh and at Sallum near the Libyan border.

The government has claimed that some 17 million mines remained in the Western Desert and another 5.5 million in Sinai and the Eastern Desert.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

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 38km<sup>2</sup> in five areas, leaving "more than 16 million mines" covering an estimated area of 248km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>7</sup> 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 105km<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

In April 2013, the Landmines in Africa blog reported that even though the minefields of El Alamein are more famous, two mine incidents in Sinai and one on the Red Sea coast highlighted the fact that Egypt's mine contamination "is more widespread".<sup>9</sup> Five soldiers were killed and seven more injured by a mine near the Red Sea resort town of Hurghada.<sup>10</sup> In Sinai, seven police were killed and nine injured in one mine incident, and

one Bedouin was killed and another injured in a second. The blog suggested that the Red Sea mine "likely dates to World War II and the first Sinai mine is from the conflicts with Israel in the 1950s and 1970s. The Bedouins were victims of a recently laid mine that detonated when struck by their tractor."<sup>11</sup>

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."<sup>12</sup> This should serve as a wake-up call to Egypt to pursue mine clearance with far greater vigour.

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## PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

In 2016 as in previous year, the mine action programme in Egypt was not functioning effectively.

In November 2006, the Egyptian government and the United Nations 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.<sup>13</sup>

The project was to be conducted in two phases lasting about 18 months each. The first phase concluded in 2014. In October 2014, the European Union (EU) agreed to provide €4.7 million to finance the second phase of the project, targeting clearance of 332km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>14</sup> In May 2015, the Director of the Executive Secretariat acknowledged that past results had been disappointing. That month, however, the UNDP and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) provided EGP13.8 million (approx. US\$1.77 million) to support a second phase of the national demining and development programme in the North-West Coast area due to last until 2017.<sup>15</sup>

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 600 square kilometres in the northern coast and would also establish infrastructure after clearance was completed.<sup>16</sup>

In May 2017, Kuwait granted Egypt an aid package of almost US\$1 million for mine clearance in the North-West Coast area.<sup>17</sup>

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## 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.<sup>18</sup>

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

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## LAND RELEASE

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

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## ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Egypt is not a state party or signatory to the APMBC but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires clearance of mines as soon as possible.

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- 2 P. Schwartzstein, "ISIS Is Digging Up Nazi Land Mines in Egypt", *Newsweek*, 10 August 2016, at: <http://europa.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 R. Imam, E. Rashed, and M. Fouad, "Devil's Gardens Nearly 639 killed & injured in El Alamein", *Middle East Observer*, 23 November 2016, at: <http://www.meobserver.org/alamein/>.
- 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 Mine Action Project Northwest Coast: Phase I Accomplishments", Presentation by Amb. Fathy El Shazly, Director, Executive Secretariat, Cairo, August 2010.
- 8 N. al Behairy, "20% of the Sahara in West Egypt cleared of landmines", *Daily News*, 20 March 2013.
- 9 "The Month in Mines, March 2016", *Landmines in Africa* blog, 18 April 2016, at: <https://landminesinafrica.wordpress.com/tag/morocco/>.
- 10 "Five Egyptian Soldiers Killed in 'Landmine Explosion' Near Hurghada", *Egyptian Streets*, 26 March 2016, at: <http://egyptianstreets.com/2016/03/26/five-egyptian-soldiers-killed-in-landmine-explosion-near-hurghada/>.
- 11 "The Month in Mines, March 2016", *Landmines in Africa* blog, 18 April 2016.
- 12 P. Schwartzstein, "ISIS Is Digging Up Nazi Landmines From World War 2 As Explosives", *Newsweek*, 10 August 2016, at: <http://europa.newsweek.com/isis-hitler-islamic-state-egypt-world-war-ii-land-mines-jihad-bombs-explosives-488927?utm>.
- 13 UNDP, "Support to the North West Coast Development and Mine Action Plan", undated.
- 14 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.
- 15 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/>.
- 16 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/>.
- 17 "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>.
- 18 GICHD, "Where we work: Egypt", June 2015, at: <http://www.gichd.org/where-we-work/egypt/#.Vx-ueCnMrX4>.