

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Egypt should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Egypt should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- Egypt should not use anti-personnel mines under any circumstances.
- Egypt should report accurately on land release, disaggregating clearance from release by survey.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The precise extent of anti-personnel mine contamination in Egypt remains unknown and past estimates have been wholly unreliable. 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 mine incidents in Sinai in the last decade 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 Between the middle of 2019 and October 2020, allegations were made of new anti-personnel mine use by non-State armed groups (NSAGs) in Egypt. These were unconfirmed as of writing.³ The Egyptian military may also be using anti-personnel mines.

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.⁴ 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.⁵ Major General Mahrous Kilani, Head of the General Secretariat for Mine Clearance, reported that while the mine maps are an indication of possible mine locations many mines have been found in areas that are unmarked by the maps.⁶

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 United Kingdom reiterated that maps of minefield locations had been provided to the Egyptian authorities and claimed, incorrectly, that, since 2006, through multilateral funding along with other donors (including Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States), it had funded clearance of 130,446 acres (almost 528km²) of land around El Alamein.⁷ Either the figure is inaccurate or the UK government actually meant release.

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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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 claimed to still be contaminated.¹⁰

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 248km².¹¹ Details of items cleared are not consistent with other available information. In November 2019, Egypt's Minister of Investment and International Cooperation announced that Egypt had cleared 2,182km² in El Alamein, without elaborating further.¹² This figure is wildly inaccurate and/or it may refer to all forms of land release, not merely clearance.

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.¹³

In May 2015, the military stated to an Egyptian newspaper that it had begun placing landmines around military outposts in Sinai, which resulted in the reported deaths of two militants.¹⁴

In August 2016, it was reported that Islamic State had been harvesting the explosives from Second World War 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."¹⁵ 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".¹⁶ 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 2017.¹⁷ This should serve as a wake-up call to Egypt to pursue mine clearance with far greater vigour than it has done so thus far.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Egypt's mine action programme has been developing extremely slowly since 2007 and includes only the basic structures and institutions to regulate, coordinate and implement mine action activities. As at 2015, the programme consisted of a three-tier structure that comprises: i) the National committee for the Supervision of Mine Clearance and the Development of the North West Coast; ii) The Executive Secretariat for the Demining and Development of the North West Coast (ESDD), and iii) The Corps of Military Engineers who has the overall responsibility to undertake demining operations in Egypt.¹⁸

In January 2017, Egypt's Minister of International Cooperation alongside a representative of the Ministry of Defense announced the establishment of the National Centre for Landmine Action and Sustainable Development. The centre set out to release 600km² of land in the North West Coast.¹⁹

A joint project between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Egypt entitled, "Support the North West Coast Development Plan and Mine Action Programme: Mine Action" was conducted in two phases from 2007 to 2014 and from 2015 to 2017.²⁰ 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.²¹

The project supported the expansion of the organizational structure of the ESDD, which is mandated with coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the development plan and humanitarian mine action activities in the North West Coast.²²

As at July 2020, it was reported that a total area of 2,182km² of land has been demined (released) from 5,100km² of contaminated land since the beginning of the project

in 2009.²³

Trained deminers from the Corps of Military Engineers conduct manual and mechanical demining. The ESDD is said to have procured 461 mine detectors, 355 demining suits and protective helmets, 1 Casspir armoured vehicle with the "Mine Lab" detecting device, and 5 Amtrak vehicles.²⁴

According to ESDD website, "the Executive Secretariat's Quality Management Unit proactively guarantees quality in all key processes, makes sure that quality requirements are fulfilled in accordance with IMAS, measures process performance, develops procedures, and provides the right equipment".²⁵ 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.

In November 2019, Egypt's Minister of Investment and International Cooperation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) on mine clearance and development of Egypt's North West coast. The MoU provides a cooperation framework to enhance capacity building for the Egyptian mine action programme.²⁶

In May 2017, Kuwait granted Egypt an aid package of almost US\$1 million through the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, for mine clearance in the North-West Coast area.²⁷ In January 2019, Egypt called for renewed international support for mine clearance, especially around El Alamein. Parliament member Mohamed el-Ghoul resubmitted a 2017 motion demanding financial compensation from the countries that laid mines in Egypt, mainly Germany and the United Kingdom.²⁸

LAND RELEASE

Egypt has not reported on its release of mined areas in recent years and no target date has been set for the completion of mine clearance. New use of mines by the military is inconsistent with its obligations under international law.

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- 4 A. Nayder, "Helping Landmine Victims in Marsa Matrouh-And Preventing More", *Because*, 3 November 2016, at: <http://bit.ly/2Hbst2V>.
- 5 Egypt and Libya: Land Mines: Written question – 122961, 16 January 2018, at: <http://bit.ly/2Z4gJsB>.
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- 18 UNDP Project Document, p. 6, at: <http://bit.ly/3ghRon1>.
- 19 "Establishment of National Center for Mines Action and Sustainable Development completed: Nasr", *Daily News Egypt*, 23 January 2017, at: <http://bit.ly/3dqbcmu>.
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- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 "Egypt, Switzerland sign agreement on demining North West Coast", State Information Service, 14 November 2019, available at: <http://bit.ly/2CcF0mj>.
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