

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Syria should accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) as a matter of priority.
- Syria should comply with its obligations under international human rights law to clear cluster munition remnants (CMR) on territory under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- Syria should establish a national mine action authority.
- Syria should develop a mine action programme enabling Syrian and international organizations to undertake systematic survey and clearance of explosive remnants of war (ERW).

CLUSTER MUNITION REMNANT CONTAMINATION

Syria is believed to have widespread CMR contamination along with dense contamination by mines (including mines of an improvised nature, see Mine Action Review's *Clearing the Mines* report on Syria for further information), and other ERW resulting from the armed conflicts continuing since 2011. The extent of contamination by any particular category of device is not known. A United Nations (UN) needs overview in 2019 estimated that 10.2 million people lived in 1,980 communities that had reported explosive contamination over the past two years.¹

Syrian government and Russian forces have used cluster munitions extensively and Islamic State has reportedly used them in a number of instances.² Opposition group Jabhat al-Nusra has also produced videos showing Russian-made submunitions being adapted for re-use as projectiles.³

In the first half of 2019, Russian and Syrian government airforces intensively bombed the demilitarised zone, including Idlib governorate, in north-west Syria. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria reported in July 2019 that air strikes on the area regularly involved use of indiscriminate weapons, including cluster munitions.⁴ Syrian state-run media reported "recent" use of cluster munitions by opposition groups in early 2019. Syria's state news agency reported that the United States (US)-led coalition used cluster munitions in air strikes carried out in Deir Ezzour province in 2018. The coalition denied the report.⁵

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria reported "an alarming number of incidents involving cluster munitions" in February 2017, affirming that their use in densely populated areas such as opposition-held eastern Aleppo "constitutes the war crime of indiscriminate attacks in a civilian populated area".⁶ Among multiple reports of attacks using cluster munitions, which could not be independently verified, the Syrian Network for Human Rights said that in the 12 months to the end of February 2017 Russian forces conducted 121 cluster munitions strikes. It said these attacks brought the total number of cluster munitions strikes by Russia since it intervened in the conflict in 2015 to 175, mostly in Aleppo (89 attacks), Idlib (68) and Hama (9).⁷

Syrian Civil Defence (SCD) said it had cleared large numbers of submunitions in Idlib and to a lesser extent in Dar'a, Hama, and Quneitra over the past two years (see Land Release section below).⁸ Human Rights Watch reported civil defence and first responders had located CMR, mostly Russian-made ShOAB-0.5 submunitions, in the towns of al-Tamanah, Jisr Al-Shughur and Maraath Harma (Idlib governorate); Qalaat al-Madiq (Hama governorate); and Tel'adeh.⁹ HALO Trust reported that Syrian NGO AFAK, working in the southern governorates of Daraa and Quneitra, had encountered seven types of cluster munition, mostly Russian-made PTAB 2.5M, A02.5RT, A-01 Sch, and SAKR B submunitions, but also Chinese-made Type 81 and one US-made BLU-97 (thought to date back to 1973).¹⁰ Unverified social media reports said cluster munitions used in Idlib in May 2019 included submunitions delivered by BM-30 SMERCH multiple rocket launchers.¹¹

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Syria does not have a national mine action authority or a national programme for survey and clearance. Mine action has been conducted by a wide range of organisations, including military engineers of parties to the conflict, civil defence organisations, humanitarian demining organisations, and commercial companies.

Russia deployed several hundred military deminers from the Armed Forces Demining Centre. Russian troops provided training courses for Syrian army engineers and conducted clearance with manual teams supported by mine detection dogs and Uran-6 mine detection robots. In 2018, Russia started to withdraw troops, including deminers, from Syria and appealed to other countries to provide support. Armenia became the first country to respond to the appeal, sending an 83-man team to Syria in February 2019, planning to focus its work on the northern governorate of Aleppo.¹²

International humanitarian and commercial operators, including Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and Tetra Tech, operated in north-eastern Syria clearing areas recaptured from Islamic State by Kurdish and US-led coalition forces.¹³ National operators included SCD, which, at the start of 2018, was working in five governorates (Dar'a, Hama, Homs, Idlib, and Quneitra) with the support of Mayday. SCD's three teams in Daraa and two teams in Quneitra operated until early July 2018

when developments brought their operations to a halt and the teams disbanded. SCD also had one clearance team working in Hama governorate and another in Idlib in 2018. By mid 2019, SCD had five clearance teams working in Hama (one team), Idlib (two) and Aleppo (two). It also planned to deploy two non-technical survey teams, one each in Hama and Idlib.¹⁴ Roj Mine Control Organization (RMCO) was conducting clearance in north and north-east Syria.¹⁵ Syrian NGO AFAK, working in partnership with HALO Trust, conducted clearance in southern provinces of Daraa and Quneitra in the early part of the year until a Syrian army drive to take control of the area.¹⁶

UNMAS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Syrian government in July 2018 under which it deployed two staff to Damascus. In January 2019, it started a first risk education training course for 26 Syrian personnel, including 16 women.¹⁷ Russia announced in March 2019 that it would provide funding of US\$1 million to support UNMAS's activities in Syria.¹⁸ In April 2019, UNMAS announced a "Humanitarian Mine Action Support to Syria (31 March 2019 – 31 March 2020)" project supported by a \$1.4 million grant from Japan which is expected to deliver risk education to 43,000 people and conduct contamination impact surveys in 85 communities, also marking and fencing off explosive hazards.¹⁹

LAND RELEASE

Comprehensive data on land released in ERW clearance operations in Syria is not available.

Russian and Syria army engineers conducted ERW clearance in areas controlled by the government in 2018, including in Homs governorate in 2018 and in Damascus, Daraa, and Quneitra governorates in the first four months of 2019, but few details were available of the location, scope, and results of their operations.²⁰

International humanitarian and commercial operators active in north-east Syria in 2018 reported clearance mainly of improvised devices left by Islamic State. Tetra Tech, working in Raqqa and Deir Ezzour in 2018 focused on critical infrastructure, operating with a toolbox that included mechanical assets, explosive detection dogs and drones, tackled some CMR but found they made up a small proportion of items cleared.²¹

SCD/Mayday previously said submunitions constituted the "vast majority" of items cleared in the course of conducting roving spot tasks in response to community requests. Between November 2015 and March 2018, SCD teams cleared nearly 16,000 submunitions, 11,759 of them in Idlib governorate, as well as 521 other items of unexploded ordnance.²² In 2018 alone, SCD destroyed 2,162 submunitions, mostly in Aleppo, Idlib, and Hama, and marked a further 118.²³

- 1 United Nations, "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview", 1 March 2019, p. 52.
- 2 Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Evidence of Islamic State Cluster Munition Use", 1 September 2014.
- 3 K. Fulmer, "Jabhat al-Nusra re-purposing SPBE and AO-2.5RT submunitions in Syria", Armament Research, 18 October 2015.
- 4 Statement to the UN Human Rights Council by Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Geneva, 2 July 2019; "Civilians killed in Idlib as Syrian government escalates its bombardment in northern Syria", Middle East Eye, 7 April 2019.
- 5 "US-led coalition uses banned cluster bombs in Deir Ezzour", SANA, 14 November 2018; "US-led coalition denies use of cluster bombs in Syria amid reported casualties", Press TV, 15 November 2019.
- 6 Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, UN doc. A/HRC/34/64, 2 February 2017, para. 57. In an annex to the report on the applicable law the Commission again asserts that: "When used in densely-populated areas such weapons [cluster munitions] are inherently indiscriminate." Ibid., Annex 1, para. 44.
- 7 Syrian Network for Human Rights, "Russian forces are worse than the Syrian regime in terms of use of cluster munitions", 24 March 2017.
- 8 Mayday Rescue, "Syria Civil Defence, Explosive Hazard Mitigation Project Overview, Nov 2015–Mar 2018", 1 March 2018.
- 9 Human Rights Watch, "Russia/Syria: Deadly airstrikes on trapped civilians", 31 October 2017.
- 10 HALO Trust, "Survey and Explosive Hazard Removal in Dar'a and Quneitra governorates, southern Syria", undated but 2018, p. 6. For further information on types and locations of submunitions found in Syria see also "Collected evidence of cluster bombs used in Syria", Brown Moses Blog, 28 August 2012, at: <http://bit.ly/2Vifwlc>.
- 11 See <http://bit.ly/2Yqal5p>.
- 12 "Russia calls for international support for demining efforts in Syria", Xinhua, 7 July 2018; and "Armenia sends deminers to Syria as part of Russia-backed mission", Radio Free Europe, 10 February 2019.
- 13 Interview with Gareth Hawkins, Chief of Party, Syria CWD, Tetra Tech EC, Erbil, Iraq, 10 May 2019; S. Kajjo, "Landmine removal crucial in post-IS Syria", Voice of America, 3 April 2019; N. Wazir, "Removing explosive hazards to promote stability in northeastern Syria", Program Manager for Syria, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, US Department of State, 13 November 2018.
- 14 Telephone interview with Luke Irving, Specialist Training and EOD Manager, Mayday Rescue, 28 March 2018; Mayday Rescue, "Syria Civil Defence, Explosive Hazard Mitigation Project Overview, Nov 2015–Mar 2018", 1 March 2018; and emails from Michael Edwards, Explosive Hazards Operations Manager, Mayday, 16 and 30 May 2019.
- 15 S. Kajjo, "Landmine removal crucial in post-IS Syria", Voice of America, 3 April 2019.
- 16 Email from Adam Boyd and Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 18 May 2018; and HALO Trust, "Survey and Explosive Hazard Removal in Dar'a and Quneitra Governorates, Southern Syria", undated but 2018; interview with Tim Porter, Director of Programmes, HALO Trust, in Geneva, 5 February 2019.
- 17 "Syria, UN Mine Action Service, Sign MoU", Syrian Arab News Agency, 8 July 2018, accessed at <http://bit.ly/2Hjenwl>; and interview with Gilles Delecourt, Senior Programme Manager, UNMAS, in Geneva, 7 February 2019.
- 18 "Russia allocates \$1 million to UN for demining of Syrian territories", Tass, 15 March 2019.
- 19 UNMAS, "Japan contributes to humanitarian mine action in Syria", 15 April 2019.
- 20 See: Bulletin of the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring in the Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, accessible at <http://bit.ly/2EadbJD>.
- 21 Interview with Gareth Hawkins, Tetra Tech EC, Erbil, Iraq, 10 May 2019.
- 22 Telephone interview with Luke Irving, Mayday Rescue, 28 March 2018; Mayday Rescue, "Syria Civil Defence, Explosive Hazard Mitigation Project Overview, Nov 2015–Mar 2018", 1 March 2018. Emails from Michael Edwards, Operations Manager, Mayday Rescue, 29 June and 2 July 2018.
- 23 Email from Michael Edwards, Mayday, 16 May 2019.