

INTERNATIONAL DAY for MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE in MINE ACTION - 4 April 2010



United Nations Mine Action Service



What is Mine Action?

Mine action is not just about landmines. In many countries, explosive remnants of war (ERW) pose an even greater threat to people's safety. ERW comprises unexploded ordnance—bombs, mortars, grenades, missiles, cluster munitions or other devices that fail to detonate on impact but remain volatile and can kill if touched or moved—and abandoned explosive ordnance.

Mine action entails more than removing unexploded ordnance (UXO) and ERWs from the ground. It also includes a full range of services aimed at eliminating the threat of those UXO/ERWs and helping the people who have fallen victim to them.

The United Nations believes that the problem of landmines can be solved within years, not decades. National commitment and continued donor support are essential to sustain the progress already made. In 2008, international funding for mine action reached to US\$518 million, and the total area cleared by mine action programs was almost 160km², i.e., the size of Brussels and the highest total ever recorded by the Landmine Monitor. In 1999, annual casualty rates were estimated at 26,000 worldwide, whereas in 2008, 5,197 casualties were reported.

Landmines and ERWs are indiscriminate in their effects, equally lethal to enemy combatants, farmers at work, and children at play.

In the past 10 years, Landmine Monitor has identified over 73,000 casualties of landmines, ERW and victim-activated improvised explosive devices in 119 states and areas.

Landmines and ERW are obstacles to sustainable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by rendering agricultural land unusable and preventing access to reconstruct homes, roads, schools, health facilities and other essential services.

Children - particularly boys - are most likely to be harmed and account for some 30 per cent of all victims of landmines. Children are particularly prone to injury from landmines/ERW because these weapons are often colourful and shiny and are very attractive to young eyes that see them as potential toys.

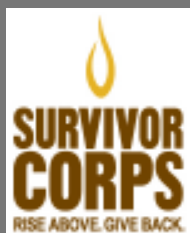
Injuries, including the loss of arms and legs, sight or hearing, cause lifelong disabilities, need urgent care and long-term support.

The United Nations Mine Action Team-Gaza Office, composed of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) and Global Medic have been active in the Gaza Strip since January 2009, in the aftermath of 'Operation Cast Lead', to minimize the threat of death or injury caused by UXO and ERW to those living and working in Gaza.

Survivor Corps began its programme in Israel and the West Bank in 2008 with the aim of bringing together Israelis and Palestinians to rebuild their communities and break cycles of violence. Former combatants, survivors of UXOs, warfare and terrorist attacks, and refugees participate in peer support programs towards alternatives to violence through cooperation on Survivor Corps sponsored projects on UXO/landmines clearance; joint sustainable water and energy projects; and cross-border human rights advocacy.



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Fouwad, 24 years old, Gaza

Fouwad was injured by a UXO when he was seven. Together with a group of kids from the neighborhood, he was playing downstairs from the house where he still lives with his parents, while a few teenagers were trying to burn “mines” that they had found lying around. Two of them burnt and exploded, injuring a number of the children looking on. Fouwad was rushed to the hospital, where they told him they could not reattach his leg, which had been torn below the knee by the blast. Fouwad spent two weeks straight in the hospital, followed by numerous visits over the next months. Two years after the accident, his leg was finally healed enough for him to receive a prosthesis. He says that the artificial limb chafed and hurt at first but with a lot of rehabilitation work in the hospital, he was able to walk again. Since then, he had to change prosthesis many times to suit his growing body. The first one was free but the others were not; his family had to pay part of the temporary artificial limbs he needed, while the rest was paid for by charities.



Today, no one can tell, at first glance, that Fouwad is an amputee. The artificial leg he now wears was paid for by UNRWA and a local NGO that supports people with disabilities. He counts himself lucky that he could get such support because a prosthesis in Gaza costs between 3,000 and 4,000 NIS, a sum his family could hardly afford. He says when he goes walking with his friends and gets tired, they say they forgot he could not walk as fast as them. Nobody treats him differently in his family either. His father and four brothers value his computer skills and are proud of his BA in accounting. Following the accident, he says it was hard for him to go back to school but he did anyway and studied hard. After a year in university studying science, he chose accounting as his major. Recently, Fouwad went to the UAE for an extra training in computer skills. He chose to come back to Gaza afterwards, and is now looking for a job as an accountant here.

A report by Clemence Pabion, Mines Advisory Group

Saleh Abu Arar, Majdal Shams, Golan Heights

“Almost 30 years ago, when I was 12 years old, I was playing right here, in the place called Valley of the Tears or Valley of the Shouts, where we, the Druze living on the Israeli side of the border, use loudspeakers to call to our relatives on the Syrian side of the border. I found a very interesting metal toy, which



later I realized was an unexploded ordnance. In the blast that followed I lost my right arm and right leg. Thank God I survived. Others were not so lucky. I have been advocating for many years for a Mine Free Golan, where children, like the Israeli boy Daniel Yuval and myself, can play safely, and farmers can grow their apples and cherries without fear. I am hopeful that the latest landmine incident will convince the Israeli government to finally clear the Golan from Landmines and UXOs”.

An interview by Dhyam Or, "Survivor Corps -

Photo by Simona Or-Munteanu



UNMAS

United Nations Mine Action Service



Abu Bilal, Husan Village, Bethlehem, West Bank

"I lived next to this minefield all my life. I have seen children blow up here and leave no traces behind them. My neighbor Ali is named after his late brother who died here in 1950s after stepping on landmine. We have tried to clear the minefield ourselves, and went to the Supreme Court to ask for permission, but because we are living in Area C of the West Bank, every move has to be approved by the army, and they demanded we hire an Israeli demining company, which we couldn't afford. As you can see, the minefield is not fenced and our children our passing it on their way to kindergarten and school. We heard a lot of talk on the matter from local and international organizations. I hope that this visit, with your [Survivor Corps] international delegation and the Mayor of Bethlehem will make a difference, so that our children will stop being injured in this minefield and start using it as a playground".



An interview by Dhyan Or, Survivor Corps -

Photo by Simona Or-Munteanu

Daniel Yuval, 11 years old, in Tel Hashomer Hospital - Injured in February 2010 in Mount Avital region, the Golan Heights

"I went to play with my sister, brother and father in the snow, and suddenly heard a blast. I looked down and my leg was gone. My father carried me back to the road, and told me it was a landmine. But there were no fences or signs there. I tried to stay



calm and told him everything that I am fine. My sister also got hurt. Other families were playing there. If it hadn't happened to me it could have happened to other kids. I want to help make Israel mine free, like our neighbor Jordan who also had a lot of landmines. When Jerry and Dhyan from Survivor Corps came to visit me in the hospital I told them that I want to help their work. They appointed me Youth Ambassador and I went to speak at the Knesset. Why do we need landmines? We should clear them up as soon as possible. I hope there will be no more kids like me who get hurt when they go to the Golan or the Arava".

An interview & photo by Dhyan Or, Survivor Corps

For more information, please contact:

- * Dhyan Or, "Mine Free Israel - Mine Free Palestine" Campaign Coordinator, Survivor Corps dor@survivorcorps.org
- * Geraldine Kelly, Project Manager, Mines Advisory Group Geraldine.Kelly@maginternational.org
- * Kerei Ruru, Programme Manager, United Nations Mine Action Team - Gaza Office KereiR@unops.org