EU mine action and victim assistance across the globe
34-year-old taxi driver Omar Musa, was amongst 40,000 Libyans who, together with his family, had to flee from the city of Tawergha after the 2011 revolution in Libya. People were living in dire conditions in camps spread across the country. Seven years later, Omar was finally able to return home. “When I arrived I was not aware of the danger that I faced. However, I found billboards and posters on the walls near the entrance of the city with emergency phone numbers to report any explosive remnants of war. I did not really understand what that meant at the time.” Indeed, in such situations, the EU supports projects to raise awareness about unexploded ordnances and mines, and to help clear people’s properties so that they can return safely home.

On the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, the European Union reaffirms its strong commitment to support actions addressing the threats of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices. For years after a conflict has ended, mines continue to cause dreadful harm, instil fear and stop refugees and internally displaced people from returning to their homes. Mines also continue to strip entire regions of a fair chance of economic recovery and development, and survivors are often condemned to a life of poverty because of their injuries and the lack of rehabilitation services.

“In the past five years, we have supported mine action for over €250 million in over 26 mine affected countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chad, Colombia, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, Syria, Turkey and Ukraine. We also help mine affected countries to set up or update national strategies for mine clearance and victim assistance, in close cooperation with the United Nations, and other donors and stakeholders,” the EU claimed.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. With all its Member States being parties to the Convention, the EU is strongly united in banning the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. The Convention is an example of what the EU stands for: a rules-based international order, rooted in the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. Therefore the EU urges countries that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention.

**EU committed to mine action across the world**

In 2017 a Council Decision to support mine affected countries was adopted. With this project the EU supports the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, by helping to set up national stakeholder dialogues on mine clearance and victim assistance with a view to increasing national capacities and ownership towards their commitments. The project is implemented by the Implementation Support Unit of the Mine Ban Convention. Stakeholder dialogues on clearance have already taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Senegal. The first two Stakeholder dialogues on victim assistance took place in Iraq and Uganda, involving especially those who are injured by mines and representatives from mine affected communities.

**Iraq...**

A landmine survivor in Iraq recounts that he used to be refused jobs because of his disability. “You cannot get a job... you are disabled”, he used to be told. ”Now thank God I have a house and own a little vegetable shop,” he states gratefully, during a stakeholder dialogue meeting on victim assistance held in Iraq.
Omar's Story - Libya...

Omar used to work as a taxi driver between his home of Tawergha, and the city of Misrata. In 2011, the rebels gained the upper hand on Gaddafi regime forces and the fighting forced Omar and his wife and two children, to flee their home alongside the entire population after seeing the city destroyed. Many people in the city of Misrata had also suffered horrific atrocities, many intentionally recruited from Tawergha to fuel communal animosity. In June 2018 after years of talks, representatives from the two communities signed a reconciliation agreement and agreed to compensate each other for damages, promising to hold accountable any individuals guilty of committing crimes during the fighting. Omar and his family could finally return home.

Upon their return to the city they were welcomed by the Mine Risk Education team of Free Fields Foundation (3F), a Libyan NGO supported by the EU. “They gave us instructions about mines and other dangerous objects and warned us not to touch or approach them,” Omar said.

When Omar reached his farm in the old city, he found it destroyed. Next to his house, he discovered some metal sticking out of one of his palm trees. Only when he got a little closer, he realised that there was a Rocket Propelled Grenade sticking out of the tree. He remembered the instructions the Mine Risk Education team. That same day the 3F Explosive Ordnance Disposal team came to dispose of the item.
Following his experience, Omar decided to work with 3F as a Community Liaison Officer providing training to fellow returnees. “I am working with my colleagues from other cities, many of whom are from Misrata. Despite the past, we are working together as one team to rebuild my city. Now, I am back living in my home with my family and feel safe and secure. My experience since returning makes me believe that despite the long road ahead, we can create a better life.”
In Libya, highly unstable explosives lie scattered around communities, hindering access to schools, playgrounds and clinics. The EU promotes safe behaviour by children toward explosive devices.

Angola...

Angola is among the most mine-affected countries in the world due to the 27-year-long civil war, which ended in 2002. Most landmines were placed near towns, villages and key infrastructure. Besides the severe loss of lives, mines and war remnants have since then prevented the local population from using the contaminated areas for agricultural purposes. The EU funded projects to tackle this challenge, together with national NGOs and other international organisations.
Road verification in Angola. The clearance of land and transport networks contributes to post-conflict recovery efforts in the country.

**Egypt...**

The huge presence of World War II landmines and ERW in the north-west coast of Egypt affects an estimated 2,680 square kilometers of land and claimed 8,313 casualties. The EU funded a project by the UN Development Programme addressing humanitarian and socio-economic impact of widespread contamination of landmines and ERW. The project has worked along three main pillars: demining, victim assistance and mine risk education.
The establishment of an artificial limbs fitting and maintenance centre in Matruh benefits survivors of landmine / ERW accidents in Egypt

Colombia...

Decades of violence killed over 220 000 people and forced seven million Colombians from their homes. In March 2015, as part of the peace agreement, the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) endorsed an ‘Agreement on the Cleaning and Decontamination of the Territory of the Presence of Antipersonnel Mines, Improvised Explosive Devices and Unexploded Ordnance, or Explosive Remnants of War in General’.
Through the United Nations Mine UNMAS-led project, the EU supports the capacity development efforts of the Colombian National Mine Action Authority to clear the most heavily mined areas in Colombia.

Laos...

Contaminated with over two million tons of munitions, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) is the most heavily affected country by cluster munitions. To tackle this challenge the EU worked with several partners including United Nations Development Programme, MAG, and local NGOs.
Identification of cluster munition in Xieng Khouang, the province with the highest UXO casualty rate in Lao PDR

By clicking on the image below you will learn more about EU mine action on the ground. This brochure, jointly produced by the European External Action Service and European Commission, illustrates several EU-funded mine action projects together with the United Nations and other international and local organisations.

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Turkey releases a documentary on demining operation along Eastern borders

Turkey’s Defence Ministry, the EU, and the UN Development Programme are jointly working on a vast programme of demining and increased surveillance along the country’s eastern borders. This 40
million euro initiative delivers a comprehensive package for security along the borders with Armenian, Azerbaijani, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Ambassador Christian Berger, Head of European Union Delegation to Turkey said, “For Turkey's border management reforms, demining is an indispensable part. We appreciate Turkey's commitment to clearing these landmines which will let Turkey a more humane and secure way of protecting the borders.”

To mark the International Day for Mine Awareness, the EU Delegation to Turkey will be releasing a documentary about the demining process in Turkey.

The EU stresses that “We should always remember that this very difficult and demanding work could not be achieved without the determination and courage of deminers all around the world, who we will always support.”

See also

Statement on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action
International Day for Mine Awareness
Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention
The EU's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)
Demining: How the EU can help clear landmines and support communities

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