Overview

Explosive remnants of war (ERW) and landmines
Syria Needs Analysis Project - August 2014

Definition: The term “explosive remnants of war (ERW)” has been used in the humanitarian community to describe various explosive remnants that are left in an area after the period of armed conflict has ended. This includes unexploded ordnance (UXO) which has been abandoned or destroyed from the area or accessible within Syria’s public health system, which has been brought to near collapse. Even decades after a conflict has ended, the presence of ERW will affect people’s ability to move freely, return and rebuild their homes, and will result in the contamination of areas primarily across southern Iraq, but also some in Kuwait and in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). According to the Iraq government, the primary risks are posed to the development of Iraq’s oil fields, tourism and agricultural sectors, however, casualties from ERW and landmines are likely underestimated. The KRI is also contaminated due to various conflicts and regional clashes. Seven of the Syrian refugee camps, such as Domiz and Gawilan, were established on or near former military installations that were at risk of UXO contamination, before risk assessments had been conducted. Mine action groups cleared and destroyed about 10,000 UXO from Domiz camp and 1,200 UXO from the Bajaj Kandala transit camp, which receives all Syrian refugees permitted to enter the KRI. Due to ongoing contamination around the camps and the limited awareness among Syrian refugees, UXO and ERW are at high risk of being affected. This contamination is located along the Syrian border. In 2003, the government of Syria and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) by the GoS, opposition groups, aid agencies and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) started systematic documentation of incidents involving explosive weapons and mines, which has been ongoing throughout the conflict in Syria, the US-led invasions and its 15-year occupation, the US bombing campaign (1983) and Israel bombardments in 2006. The 2010 conflict, in which Israel bombarded southern Lebanon with 4 million cluster munitions in the space of 2 months resulted in 1/4 of Lebanon’s arable land contaminated, up to 1/3 of the Lebanese population were affected, and the economic costs of lost livelihoods, mine action activities and casualties were estimated at between USD 150 and 230 million. According to the UN Secretary-General’s annual report on mine action for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, there has been a significant increase in the number of casualties from ERW.

Casualties 2008-2012

Introduction

While the physical and humanitarian impacts of explosive weapons, such as mortars, missiles, bombs and bombs, have been high visible and documented throughout the conflict in Syria, the unexploded remnants of these weapons and landmines have received limited attention but will have long-term implications. In the immediate term, people are killed and maimed, with children making up nearly half of the victims globally. Furthermore, survivors require specialised services that are not available or accessible within Syria’s public health system, which has been brought to near collapse. Even decades after a conflict has ended, the presence of ERW will affect people’s ability to move freely, return and rebuild their homes, and will result in the contamination of areas primarily across southern Iraq, but also some in Kuwait and in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). According to the Iraq government, the primary risks are posed to the development of Iraq’s oil fields, tourism and agricultural sectors, however, casualties from ERW and landmines are likely underestimated. The KRI is also contaminated due to various conflicts and regional clashes. Seven of the Syrian refugee camps, such as Domiz and Gawilan, were established on or near former military installations that were at risk of UXO contamination, before risk assessments had been conducted. Mine action groups cleared and destroyed about 10,000 UXO from Domiz camp and 1,200 UXO from the Bajaj Kandala transit camp, which receives all Syrian refugees permitted to enter the KRI. Due to ongoing contamination around the camps and the limited awareness among Syrian refugees, UXO and ERW are at high risk of being affected. This contamination is located along the Syrian border. In 2003, the government of Syria and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) by the GoS, opposition groups, aid agencies and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) started systematic documentation of incidents involving explosive weapons and mines, which has been ongoing throughout the conflict in Syria, the US-led invasions and its 15-year occupation, the US bombing campaign (1983) and Israel bombardments in 2006. The 2010 conflict, in which Israel bombarded southern Lebanon with 4 million cluster munitions in the space of 2 months resulted in 1/4 of Lebanon’s arable land contaminated, up to 1/3 of the Lebanese population were affected, and the economic costs of lost livelihoods, mine action activities and casualties were estimated at between USD 150 and 230 million. According to the UN Secretary-General’s annual report on mine action for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, there has been a significant increase in the number of casualties from ERW.

All regions of Lebanon have been significantly affected by ERW due to its various conflicts, including the civil war (1970-1990), 2 US-led invasions and its 15-year occupation, the US bombing campaign (1983) and Israel bombardments in 2006. The 2010 conflict, in which Israel bombarded southern Lebanon with 4 million cluster munitions in the space of 2 months resulted in 1/4 of Lebanon’s arable land contaminated, up to 1/3 of the Lebanese population were affected, and the economic costs of lost livelihoods, mine action activities and casualties were estimated at between USD 150 and 230 million. According to the UN Secretary-General’s annual report on mine action for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012, there has been a significant increase in the number of casualties from ERW.

The risk of Syrian refugees in Lebanon being affected by ERW and mines is relatively limited among refugee host countries in the region due to the following factors: (1) Syrians have a limited understanding of the general risks of ERW and mines compared to other refugee-hosting countries in the region. (2) Syria’s borders have been mined and destroyed by the Assad regime in the past, particularly since the Syrian civil war began in 2011. (3) Syrian refugees have not been exposed to the risks of explosive weapons and landmines prior to the current conflict in Syria. (4) The majority of refugee-hosting countries in the region have seen significant increases in the number of refugees and have been informed of the risks posed by unexploded ordnance. Mine action and clearance activities have been limited in the Middle East, with fewer than 300 people reported to have received risk education and victim assistance in the first half of the year. A significant number of people have been injured and killed as a result of the use of explosive weapons and landmines in the region. The number of casualties from explosive weapons and landmines in the region has increased significantly in recent years, with a significant number of people killed and maimed as a result of the use of explosive weapons and landmines in the region. The number of casualties from explosive weapons and landmines in the region has increased significantly in recent years, with a significant number of people killed and maimed as a result of the use of explosive weapons and landmines in the region.