

The Anti-personal Landmine Epidemic and Virtual Contemporary Art Exhibition of humanitarian disaster caused by anti-personal landmines Conference, May 12, 2021

AP Mines / ERW Contamination in Libya

Introduction:

Landmine contamination in Libya is a legacy from World War II, as well as subsequent armed conflicts with Egypt in 1977 and Chad in 1980-1987, which led to the laying of mines on the Libyan border with these two countries. It is also believed that the Libyan border with Tunisia is polluted. During Muammar Gaddafi's four decades of rule, mines were laid around a number of sites, including military installations and major infrastructure.

Mines were used by government and opposition forces during the 2011 conflict that led to the overthrow of Gaddafi. The concentration of violent conflict in urban areas has polluted densely populated cities, complicating survey, and clearance efforts. In January 2020, the United Nations estimated that Libya was contaminated with some 20 million mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW)¹.

Over a million explosive remnants of war and nearly 54 tons of small arms ammunition have been removed across Libya since 2011.

Casualties:

In Libya, from 2008 to 2019, mines / ERW killed 436 people and injured 2,915 others. In 2019 there were 11 dead and 14 injured, a total of 25 casualties². According to the latest statement from the Libyan Mine Action and War Remnants Center³, the number of mine / ERW victims from May 2020 to March 2021 reached 236 victims, of whom 93 died and 143 were injured, civilians accounted for 69% of the total casualties in the said period⁴.

The large increase in the number of casualties⁵, especially among civilians, compared to 2019, is due to the mines and improvised explosive devices (IED's) planted by the militias loyal to Khalifa Haftar and the Russian mercenaries, the Wagner Group, in

residential areas, health and service facilities, in the southern suburbs of Tripoli, and in the areas surrounding the city of Sirte, in addition to ERW's.

Intent to target Civilians:

The southern suburbs of Tripoli: *Khullat al-Ferjan, Salah al-Din, al-Sidra, Ain Zara, al-Mashrou' and Wadi Rabee'*, are among the most threatened areas due to the large quantities of mines and IED's planted in civilian homes. In these suburbs fierce clashes, between forces of the Government of National Accord and militias and mercenaries loyal to Haftar, took place for over 12 months. The latter planted hundreds of explosive devices and mines before they withdrew from these suburbs. Experts believe that they pose the gravest threats to the lives of civilians because they last for tens of years, in addition they are actuated by means of reactive detonators.

At the end of September 2020, the military engineering teams of the Joint Military Committee announced the destruction of 10 tonnes of mines that were planted within the Southern residential areas of Tripoli.

In early February 2021, the Libyan Center for Mine and War Remnants Removal announced the destruction of 7 tonnes of war remnants, indicating that it was the second batch of a total of 20 tonnes collected thus far⁶.

Evidence indicates clear intent to target civilians with these mines and IED's⁷. Photos and video clips circulating on social media accounts, show mines & IED's discovered in Tripoli's southern districts, inside children rooms, in closets, most infamous an IED linked to a teddy bear inside a child's room⁸, and another attached to a football.

The use of anti-personnel landmines and booby traps to target civilians is an act of war crimes under International Humanitarian Law, for which the perpetrators should be held accountable under international criminal law⁹. It also hinders the safe return of the displaced to their homes and areas¹⁰.

Human Rights Solidarity Tripoli - Libya

Related information:

Since 2016, more than 166,000 people (123,000 children, 43,000 adults) have benefited from explosive ordnance awareness-raising activities aimed at helping them to live more safely despite the danger of explosive remnants of war. In addition, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) provided risk awareness training for 217 UN personnel in 2019 and 2020 to increase knowledge and promote safe behaviour.

Since 2015, the United Nations Mine Action Service in Libya has developed the capacities of more than 275 Libyans in various aspects of mine action¹¹.

¹ The International Campaign to Ban Landmines: "[Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor – Libya](#)", Last updated March 26, 2021.

² *ibid.*

³ Libya Al-Ahrar TV Channel website: "[163 civilians killed by mines since last May](#)", March 28, 2021. There were 236 mine casualties between May 2020 and March 2021, including 163 civilians and 73 mine-specialists. According to the center's statement, the victims were 93 dead and 143 injured, including 228 males and 8 females, whose ages ranged from four years to 70 years. The ministry's statistics cover the period between May 22, 2020, and March 28, 2021 in the cities of Tripoli, Sirte, Bani Walid, Tarhuna, Benghazi, Derna, Al-Weshka, Misrata and Mezdah.

⁴ The data on numbers of casualties from mines / ERW is for the period from May 2020 to March 2021. Data for the whole year of 2020 is not available.

⁵ From May 22 to June 10, 2020, the Libyan Center for Mine Action and War Remnants documented 86 casualties as a result of mines south of Tripoli, resulting in the death of 31 citizens and mine clearance workers affiliated with the Ministries of Interior and Defense of the Government of National Accord. The center indicated that the victims ranged between 8 and 65 years old, adding that the Center receives an average of 50 reports of mines every day. Arabi 21 website, Abdel Aziz Eissa: "[Mines of death claim more victims in Tripoli, Libya](#)", June 14, 2020.

⁶ Al-Araby al-Jadeed website: "[Libya: Mine Victims Complain of Neglect](#)", March 11, 2021.

⁷ Al-Araby al-Jadeed website: "[Libya: Mine Victims Complain of Neglect](#)", March 11, 2021.

⁸ Al-Jazeera Mubasher: "[In pictures, Haftar's forces booby-trap children's toys before their withdrawal](#)", June 4, 2020.

⁹ The International Criminal Court: "[The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#)". Article (8): Paragraphs (2-a-3), (2-a-4), (2-b-1), (2-b-2), (2-b-9).

¹⁰ In Libya, the number of internally displaced people is estimated at 392,241 and returnees at 493,716. The likelihood of safe return is minimal until non-technical and/or technical surveys are carried out, spot tasks are carried out for explosive ordnance disposal, and/or clearance of areas where clashes took place.

¹¹ United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS): "[About UNMAS work in Libya](#)".