

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Morocco should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Morocco should continue to submit voluntary APMBC Article 7 reports. It should provide greater detail on the extent of mine contamination and report on progress according to international standards for land release methodology.
- Morocco should establish a timeline for completing clearance of all mined areas on territory under its jurisdiction or control.
- Morocco should ensure freedom of access and unhindered movement of all UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) personnel and take all necessary measures to facilitate the conduct of demining.
- Morocco is strongly encouraged to provide minefield records to other relevant stakeholders to facilitate survey and clearance of affected areas.
- Despite not yet being a State Party to the APMBC, Morocco has obligations under international human rights law to clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.

## UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The exact extent of contamination from mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the area of Western Sahara controlled by Morocco, on the west side of the Berm,<sup>1</sup> is not known. In the past, Morocco declared, highly improbably, that a total of 120,000km<sup>2</sup> of area was contaminated,<sup>2</sup> although the threat is undoubtedly significant.

Morocco's contamination is a result of the conflict between the Royal Moroccan Army (RMA) and Polisario Front forces over Western Sahara. Morocco has reported having registered and mapped the minefields it has laid, and has pledged to clear them as soon as the conflict over Western Sahara is over.<sup>3</sup>

Morocco reported in its latest voluntary APMBC Article 7 transparency report covering 2019 that the following provinces were mine affected: Tata, Akka, Aousserd, Assa-Zag, Boujdour, Dakhla, Laayoune, Smara, and Tan Tan.<sup>4</sup> In its corresponding Article 7 report covering 2018, Morocco had reported that 10 localities within these provinces contain mines: Bir Anzarane, Douiek, Gerret Auchfaght, Gor Lbard, Gor Zalagat, Hagounia, Idiriya, Imlili, Itgui, and Tarf Mhkinza. It claimed these contain contamination as the result of "haphazard" mine laying across the south of Morocco by the Polisario Front in 1975–91.<sup>5</sup>

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## NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Morocco does not have a national mine action authority or a mine action centre. The RMA carries out demining, which it reports is conducted in collaboration with MINURSO.<sup>6</sup>

In 2019, the RMA continued to receive training from the United States (US) Marines on demining and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) techniques.<sup>7</sup>

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## GENDER AND DIVERSITY

Morocco is not believed to have a gender policy in place for its demining operations.

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## INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Morocco does not use the Information Management System for Mine Action.

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## PLANNING AND TASKING

It is not known how Morocco plans its demining operations.

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## LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

Morocco appears to use only manual demining techniques, which is not efficient given the size and type of terrain being released.

### STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

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Morocco has not adopted national mine action legislation or standards, but has reported that "normal safety and environmental protection standards have been followed" in clearance of mines and ERW.<sup>8</sup>

### OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

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All mine clearance in Morocco is conducted by the RMA. In 2019, it reported that 13 demining modules and 165 demining detachments were deployed and responded to 54 interventions during the year.<sup>9</sup>

Previously, in 2010, Morocco declared it had employed 10,000 deminers, though only 400 detectors were at their disposal at that time.<sup>10</sup> This raised serious questions both about the procedures being used and the accuracy of clearance figures being reported.

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## LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

Morocco has not reported in detail on its release of mined areas in recent years, nor given any indication of implementing land release methodology. The figures it does provide are not credible and should be taken as an indication of land released or declared as clear of contamination rather than land physically cleared.

In its voluntary Article 7 report covering 2019, Morocco reported "clearance" of a total area of 301km<sup>2</sup>, with the destruction of 23 anti-personnel mines, 21 anti-vehicle mines, and 511 items of ERW.<sup>11</sup> This compares to 2018 when Morocco reported "clearance" of a total area of 313.4km<sup>2</sup>, with the destruction of 232 anti-personnel mines, 18 anti-vehicle mines, and 574 items of ERW.<sup>12</sup> Morocco also reported that there were 25 casualties due to mines in 2019, the highest number since 2015.<sup>13</sup>

In his October 2019 report to the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General reported that, from 1 March to 31 July 2019, the RMA claimed to have cleared more than 98km<sup>2</sup> of land west of the berm, with the destruction of 441 items, consisting of 415 items of unexploded ordnance, 17 anti-personnel mines, and 9 anti-vehicle mines.<sup>14</sup> Previously, in his April 2019 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that the RMA had reported "clearing" more than 126km<sup>2</sup> of land to the west of the berm with the destruction of 679 items, including 614 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO), as well as 53 anti-vehicle and 12 anti-personnel mines during the period 3 October 2018 to 1 April 2019.<sup>15</sup> No further details were provided.

Morocco has reported that since 1975 and through the end of October 2019, a total of 96,727 mines, of which 49,325 were anti-personnel mines, along with 20,543 items of ERW had been destroyed and a total of almost 5,561km<sup>2</sup> was cleared during demining operations.<sup>16</sup>

Morocco initiated major demining efforts in 2007, following an increase in the number of incidents. In April 2016, Morocco reported plans to clear mines from along the Berm. The units to be deployed were reportedly those trained by the US Marines.<sup>17</sup>

Morocco is not a State Party to the APMBC, but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible. Morocco has stated on numerous occasions its determination to voluntarily comply with the provisions of the APMBC, including completion of stockpile destruction of anti-personnel mines and demining. It has provided annual voluntary Article 7 reports to the APMBC regularly over the past decade and attends APMBC meetings as an observer. It has not, however, indicated when it might complete mine clearance.

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- 1 The Berm refers to the defensive wall built by Morocco in 1982–87 to secure the north-western corner of Western Sahara. It is constituted of earthen walls some three metres in height. Morocco controls the area located on the west side of the Berm.
  - 2 Statement of Morocco, Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 25 May 2009.
  - 3 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2019), Form D; Statement of Morocco, Fourth APMBC Review Conference, Oslo, 26 November 2019.
  - 4 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2019), Form D.
  - 5 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form D. Idiriya is spelled "Jdiriya" in the 2018 report. From 2015, the area of Glibat Jadiane, which had been listed as contaminated in earlier years, was no longer included on the list of mined areas.
  - 6 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form D.
  - 7 AFRICOM, "Humanitarian Mine Action increases demining capacity in Morocco", 2 May 2019, at: [bit.ly/2LitXKS](https://bit.ly/2LitXKS).
  - 8 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form D.
  - 9 Statement of Morocco, Fourth APMBC Review Conference, Oslo, 27 November 2019.
  - 10 Statement of Morocco, Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 23 June 2010.
  - 11 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2019), Form D.
  - 12 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form C.
  - 13 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2019), Form D.
  - 14 "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara", UN doc. S/2019/787, 2 October 2019, para. 48.
  - 15 "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara", UN doc. S/2019/282, 1 April 2019, para. 48.
  - 16 Statement of Morocco, Fourth APMBC Review Conference, Oslo, 27 November 2019.
  - 17 "Morocco to Deploy Highly Qualified Team to Remove Sahara Landmines", *Sahara Question*, 25 March 2016, at: [bit.ly/2LU9d4](https://bit.ly/2LU9d4).