

MOROCCO



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.
- Morocco should seek assistance to develop a functioning civilian mine action programme.

CONTAMINATION

The exact extent of contamination of the area of Western Sahara controlled by Morocco, on the west side of the Berm,¹ is not known. In the past, Morocco declared, highly improbably, that a total of 120,000km² of area was contaminated,² although the threat is undoubtedly significant.

Morocco's contamination is a result of the conflict between the Royal Moroccan Army 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.³

In April 2013, Morocco had identified ten areas as having been mined by the Polisario Front since 1975: Bir Anzarane, Douiek, Gerret Auchfaght, Gor Lbard, Gor Zalagat, Hagounia, Idiriya, Imlili, Itgui, and Tarf Mhkinza.⁴ It repeated this list in a voluntary Article 7 report it submitted in November 2015.⁵ 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

In its voluntary Article 7 report for 2016, Morocco reported that two people were killed and a further seventeen injured during the year.⁷

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Morocco does not have a national mine action authority or a mine action centre.

Standards

Morocco has not adopted national mine action standards, but reported, most recently in April 2013, that “normal safety and environmental protection standard have been followed.”⁸

Operators

Morocco initiated major demining efforts in 2007, following an increase in the number of incidents. All mine clearance in Morocco is conducted manually by the Royal Moroccan Army (RMA).

In March 2016, it was reported that United States (US) Marines were providing training to build the demining capacity of the RMA. US instructors covered ordnance identification, safety, basic demolition, and basic combat casualty care.⁹

The UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has been coordinating mine action activities with both parties to the conflict. In March 2016, however, Morocco required that MINURSO international civilian personnel “leave the Kingdom of Morocco within three days”.¹⁰ This included all international staff overseeing the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS)-managed demining project within MINURSO, resulting in the suspension of all demining activities since 20 March 2016.¹¹ Morocco demanded the staff leave because UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had used the term “occupation” to describe the situation east of the Berm during a visit to the region.¹²

LAND RELEASE

Morocco has not reported with any detail on its release of mined areas in recent years. In its voluntary Article 7 report for 2016 Morocco reported release of 283km² with the destruction of 288 anti-personnel mines, 170 anti-vehicle mines, and 1,899 explosive remnants of war (ERW).¹³

In his April 2016 report to the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General noted that the RMA had reported “clearing” more than 220km² of land to the west of the berm with the destruction of 9,873 items, including “anti-tank” mines and anti-personnel mines, UXO, and small arms ammunition.¹⁴ No further details were provided.

In 2010, Morocco declared it had employed 10,000 deminers, though only 400 detectors were at their disposal at that time.¹⁵ This raised serious questions both about the procedures being used and the accuracy of clearance figures being reported.

In April 2016, Morocco was planning to launch a new effort to clear mines from the berm that divides Western Sahara into the Moroccan-controlled area and the Polisario-controlled area. The units to be deployed were reportedly those trained by the US Marines.¹⁶

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Morocco is not a state party or signatory to the APMBBC but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires clearance of mines as soon as possible.

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 (Standing Committee on General Status and Operation of the Convention), Geneva, 25 May 2009.

3 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2014), Form C.

4 Voluntary Article 7 Report, April 2013, Form C.

5 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2014), Form C.

6 Voluntary Article 7 Report, April 2011, Form C.

7 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2016), Form C.

8 Voluntary Article 7 Report, April 2013, Form C.

9 “U.S., Morocco improve demining capability”, *The Globe*, 31 March 2016, at: http://www.camplejeuneglobe.com/news/u-s-morocco-improve-demining-capability/article_0e45e62e-f6a0-11e5-9b3b-db975e6458de.html.

10 “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara”, UN doc. S/2016/355, 19 April 2016, §4.

11 *Ibid.*, §39.

12 P. Markey, “Morocco’s U.N. expulsion puts Western Sahara ceasefire at risk: movement”, *Reuters*, 22 March 2016, at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-morocco-sahara-idUSKCN0W02BK>.

13 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2016), Form C.

14 “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara”, UN doc. S/2016/355, 19 April 2016, §41.

15 Statement of Morocco, intersessional meetings (Standing Committee on General Status and Operation of the Convention), Geneva, 23 June 2010.

16 “Morocco to Deploy Highly Qualified Team to Remove Sahara Landmines”, *Sahara Question*, 25 March 2016, at: <http://sahara-question.com/en/news/morocco-deploy-highly-qualified-team-remove-sahara-landmines>.