

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Morocco should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Morocco should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.
- 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 mine action standards (IMAS) for land release methodology.
- Morocco should establish a timeline for completing clearance of all mined areas on territory under its jurisdiction or control.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The exact extent of contamination from mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Morocco, including the area under its control in Western Sahara, 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 huge. According to the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), of the 2,700km-long Berm, 1,465km is significantly contaminated with landmines and ERW on both sides.³

Morocco's contamination is mostly a result of the conflict of 1975–91 between the Royal Moroccan Army (RMA) and Polisario Front forces over Western Sahara. Morocco acknowledges that it had laid mine belts during the construction of the Berm and states that these mined areas are surveyed and mapped. Morocco has pledged to clear the mines it laid as soon as the conflict over Western Sahara is "definitely settled".⁴

Morocco reported in its latest voluntary APMBC Article 7 transparency report (covering 2020) that the following provinces were mine affected: Akka, Aousserd, Assa-Zag, Boujdour, Dakhla, Laayoune, Smara, Tantan, and Tata.⁵ In its 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 1975–91.⁶ In its latest Article 7 report, Morocco also reported suspected mine contamination in its far eastern corner bordering Algeria in the El-Melias corridor in Figuig province.⁷ It is not clear when these mines were emplaced or by whom, but media reports indicate that they were laid in the 1990s as a result of border tensions between the two neighbouring States.⁸

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.⁹

In 2020, as in the previous year, the RMA received training from the United States (US) Marines on demining and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) techniques.¹⁰

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

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

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

It is not known which information management system is used in Morocco for recording mine action data.

PLANNING AND TASKING

It is not known how Morocco plans and prioritises its demining operations.

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

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.¹¹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

All mine clearance in Morocco is conducted by the RMA. In 2019, Morocco reported that 13 demining modules and 165 demining detachments were deployed and responded to 54 interventions during the year.¹²

Previously, in 2010, Morocco declared it had employed 10,000 deminers, though only 400 detectors were at their disposal at that time.¹³ This raised serious questions both about the procedures being used and the accuracy of clearance figures being reported.

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 with respect to physical clearance and should be taken as an indication of land released or declared as clear of contamination rather than land actually released by clearance.

In its voluntary Article 7 report covering 2020, Morocco reported “clearance” of a total area of 171km² with the destruction of 22 anti-personnel mines, 29 anti-vehicle mines, and 542 items of ERW.¹⁴ This is a significant decrease compared to the 301km² that Morocco reported to have cleared the preceding year.¹⁵ Morocco also reported that there were 23 mine-related casualties in 2020, with one person killed and the other 22 injured.¹⁶

In his October 2020 report to the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General reported that, since October 2019, the RMA reported the release of over 253km² of land west of the Berm, with the destruction of 796 items, including 37 anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines.¹⁷ In his October 2019 report, the Secretary-General had reported that, from 1 March to 31 July 2019, the RMA claimed to have cleared more than 98km² 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.¹⁸ 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 5,561km² was cleared during demining operations.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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 2,700 kilometres long and 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 MINURSO website, Mine Action, accessed 26 July 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3eYLd64>.
 - 4 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form D.
 - 5 Ibid.
 - 6 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.
 - 7 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form D.
 - 8 "Fguig, mine disposal leads to rumors of conflict on the eastern borders", *Chouf TV*, (Arabic), 20 February 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3rIWGvO>.
 - 9 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form D.
 - 10 AFRICOM, "Humanitarian Mine Action increases demining capacity in Morocco", 2 May 2019, at: <http://bit.ly/2LltXKS>; and AFRICOM, "U.S. Marines Continue Humanitarian Mine Action Program", 12 March 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2TAzmDF>.
 - 11 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form D.
 - 12 Statement of Morocco, Fourth APMBC Review Conference, Oslo, 27 November 2019.
 - 13 Statement of Morocco, Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 23 June 2010.
 - 14 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form D.
 - 15 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2019), Form D.
 - 16 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form D.
 - 17 "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara", UN doc. S/2020/938, 23 September 2020, para. 42.
 - 18 "Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara", UN doc. S/2019/787, 2 October 2019, para. 48.
 - 19 Statement of Morocco, Fourth APMBC Review Conference, Oslo, 27 November 2019.
 - 20 "Morocco to Deploy Highly Qualified Team to Remove Sahara Landmines", *Sahara Question*, 25 March 2016, at: <http://bit.ly/2LU9d4>.