

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP) MINE CONTAMINATION: MASSIVE

NO CREDIBLE FIGURE

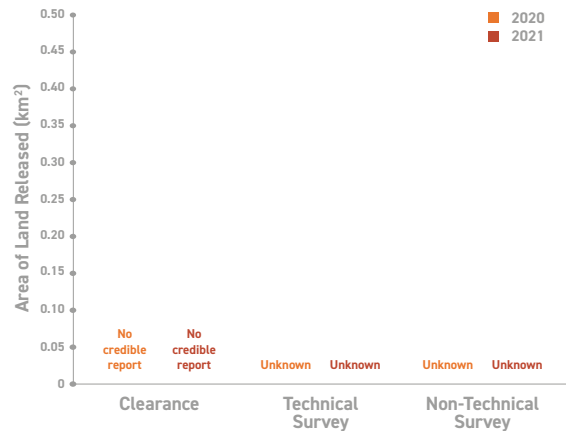
AP MINE
CLEARANCE IN 2021

**NO CREDIBLE
REPORT**

AP MINES
DESTROYED IN 2021

1,289

LAND RELEASE OUTPUT



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 in land release according to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).
- Morocco should establish a timeline for completing clearance of all mined areas on territory under its jurisdiction or control.

DEMINING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

- No national mine action authority.
- No national mine action centre.

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Royal Moroccan Army (RMA)

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- None

OTHER ACTORS

- United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara (MINURSO) Mine Action

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 massive. 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 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) Article 7 transparency report (covering 2021) 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 last two Article 7 reports (covering 2020 and 2021), 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

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Morocco does not have a national mine action authority or a mine action centre. The RMA carries out demining, which, it has reported, is conducted in collaboration with MINURSO.⁹

In 2021, as in previous years, the RMA received training from the United States (US) Marines, including on demining and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) techniques.¹⁰ In 2021, this included a train-the-trainer course so that in the future RMA will be able to train its own personnel,¹¹ and a four-week training programme on handling explosive hazards.¹²

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ACTION

It is not known what environmental policies and practices Morocco adheres to, if any, but it has reported that "normal safety and environmental protection standards have been followed" in clearing mines and ERW.¹³

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

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

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 28 July 2022, at: <https://bit.ly/3BmYLnM>.

4 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2021), 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 Reports (covering 2020 and 2021), 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, "U.S. Marines Continue Humanitarian Mine Action Program", 12 March 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2TAzMDf>.

11 Defense Visual Information Service, "Humanitarian Mine Action 2021", 6 September 2021 at: <https://bit.ly/3b9KArP>.

12 US Embassies and Consulates in Morocco, "U.S. and Moroccan Armed Forces Conclude Joint Training Programs on Disaster Response and Explosive Hazards", 23 September 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/30Dd6zy>.

13 Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2018), Form D.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

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 the clearance of mines and ERW,¹⁴ as indicated above. It has also reported that the demining activities undertaken by the RMA conform to international rules and techniques.¹⁵

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

All mine clearance in Morocco is conducted by the RMA. In June 2022, Morocco indicated that 13 demining units had been continuously deployed each year since 2007 until 28 February 2022, and that 1,161 limited interventions were undertaken between 2014 and 28 February 2022.¹⁶

Previously, in 2010, Morocco declared it had employed 10,000 deminers, although only 400 detectors were at their disposal at that time.¹⁷ This raised serious questions both about the procedures being used and the accuracy of clearance figures being reported, which are not credible. Morocco reports that demining takes places in the framework of a vast annual programme that aims to release suspected areas of contamination.¹⁸

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 2021, Morocco reported “clearance” of a total area of 217km² with the destruction of 1,289 anti-personnel mines, 281 anti-vehicle mines, and 564 items of ERW.¹⁹ These figures are an increase on those reported in 2020 when 171km² was reported

“cleared” with 22 anti-personnel mines, 29 anti-vehicle mines, and 542 items of ERW destroyed.²⁰ Further detail has been provided about demining activities on the borders in the east of the country where, between 9 November 2020 and 5 July 2021, Morocco reported that 0.36km² of land was cleared, and that 2,931 anti-personnel mines, 262 anti-vehicle mines, and 123 items of ERW were destroyed.²¹ The high number of anti-personnel mines reported discovered and destroyed in the east of the country in the seven months from 9 November 2020 (2,391 anti-personnel mines) raises further questions given that Morocco reported 1,289 anti-personnel mines destroyed across the country throughout 2021.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (covering 2021), Form B.

¹⁶ Statement of Morocco, APMBC Intersessional meeting, Geneva, June 2022; and Information Leaflet, *Strong Commitment for Population's Safety – All Against Antipersonnel Mines and Remnants of War* (covering 1975 to 2021), Kingdom of Morocco, undated.

¹⁷ Statement of Morocco, Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 23 June 2010.

¹⁸ CCW Amended Protocol II Article 13 Report (covering 2021), Form B.

¹⁹ Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2021), Form D.

²⁰ Voluntary Article 7 Report (covering 2020), Form D.

²¹ Statement of Morocco, APMBC 19th Meeting of States Parties, virtual meeting, November 2019.

In his October 2021 report to the UN Security Council on the situation in Western Sahara, the UN Secretary-General indicated that the RMA had reported the release of 145km² of land west of the Berm between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021, with the destruction of 1,014 items of ERW and 31 anti-personnel and anti-tank mines.²² This compares with 253km² of land west of the Berm reported by the RMA as released in the previous 12 months, with the destruction of 796 items, including 37 landmines.²³ No further details were provided. MINURSO continues to promote enhanced cooperation between the RMA and MINURSO mine action.²⁴

Morocco has reported that since 1975 and through the end of February 2022, a total of 96,818 mines were destroyed, of which 49,366 were anti-personnel mines.²⁵ Morocco reported that 47,452 anti-vehicle mines were destroyed during the same period.²⁶

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.²⁷

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 submitted annual voluntary APMBC Article 7 reports over the past decade and attends APMBC meetings as an observer. It has not, however, indicated when it might complete mine clearance. In a statement on universalisation at the APBMC meetings in June 2022, Morocco repeated its commitment to the APBMC.²⁸ It indicated that its accession to the APBMC was a strategic objective and that its achievement had been delayed by the "artificial" conflict imposed on the Kingdom by enemies of its territorial integrity. When the conflict is finally resolved, Morocco indicated that there will be no obstacle to its adherence to the Convention.

22 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, UN doc. S/2021/843, 1 October 2021, para. 46.

23 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, UN doc. S/2020/938, 23 September 2020, para. 42.

24 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, UN doc. S/2021/843, 1 October 2021, para. 46.

25 Statement of Morocco, APBMC Intersessional Meetings, 22 June 2022.

26 Information Leaflet, *Strong Commitment for Population's Safety – All Against Antipersonnel Mines and Remnants of War* (covering 1975 to 2021), Kingdom of Morocco, undated.

27 "Morocco to Deploy Highly Qualified Team to Remove Sahara Landmines", *Sahara Question*, 25 March 2016, at: <http://bit.ly/2Llu9d4>.

28 Statement of Morocco, APBMC Intersessional Meetings, 22 June 2022.