

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 clarify in greater detail the extent of contamination remaining to be addressed and implement and report on progress according to international standards for land release methodology.
- Morocco should establish a timeline for completion of clearance of all mined areas on territory under its jurisdiction or control.
- Morocco should ensure freedom of access and unhindered movement of all civilian UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) staff and take all necessary measures to facilitate the conduct of demining.
- Morocco is strongly encouraged to provide any minefield records to other relevant stakeholders to facilitate survey and clearance of affected areas.

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,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

At the end of 2018, Morocco continued to report 10 localities as containing mines: Bir Anzarane, Douiek, Gerret Auchfaght, Gor Lbard, Gor Zalagat, Hagounia, Idiriya, Imlili, Itgui, and Tarf Mhkinza. It claims these contain contamination as the result of "haphazard" mine laying across the south of Morocco by the Polisario Front in 1975–91.⁴

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Morocco does not have a national mine action authority or a mine action centre. The Royal Moroccan Army (RMA) carries out demining, which it reports are conducted in collaboration with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) observers.⁵

In 2018, the RMA continued to receive training from the United States (US) Marines on demining and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) techniques, along with continued support from the National Guard of the US state of Utah through the State Partnership Programme, and additionally reported participating in a number of regional mine action trainings and workshops during the year.⁶

GENDER

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

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

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

PLANNING AND TASKING

It is not known how Morocco plans its demining operations. Operations are carried out in collaboration with MINURSO.

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.⁷

OPERATORS

All mine clearance in Morocco is conducted by the RMA. In 2017, it reported that 16 demining modules and 89 demining detachments were operational and responded to

175 interventions during the year.⁸ Morocco did not provide further detail and did not report on the RMA's demining capacity in 2018.

OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Previously, in 2010, Morocco declared it had employed 10,000 deminers, though only 400 detectors were at their disposal at that time.⁹ 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 and should be taken as an indication of land released or declared as clear of contamination rather than land physically cleared.

In a voluntary Article 7 report for 2018, Morocco reported “clearance” of a total area of 313.4km², with the destruction of 232 anti-personnel mines, 18 anti-vehicle mines, and 574 items of ERW.¹⁰ This compares to 2017, when Morocco reported “clearance” of 232km², with the destruction of 69 anti-personnel mines, 82 anti-vehicle mines, and 595 items of ERW.¹¹

In his October 2018 report to the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General reported that, since April of that year, the RMA claimed to have cleared more than 84km² of land west of the berm, with the destruction of 344 items, consisting of 268 items of unexploded ordnance, 74 anti-personnel mines, and 2 anti-vehicle mines.¹² Previously, in his April 2018 report, the UN Secretary-General noted that the RMA had reported “clearing” nearly 145km² of land to the west of the Berm with the destruction of 1,121 items, including 1,008 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO), as well as 57 anti-vehicle and 56 anti-personnel mines during the period 10 April 2017 to 29 March 2018.¹³ No further details were provided.

Morocco has reported that since 1975, as at end April 2019, a total of 96,704 mines, including 49,316 anti-personnel mines, and a further 20,132 items of ERW had been destroyed and a total of almost 5,440km² was cleared during demining operations.¹⁴

Morocco initiated major demining efforts in 2007, following an increase in the number of incidents. In April 2016, Morocco was reportedly planning 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.¹⁵

Morocco is not a state party to the APMB, 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 APMB, including completion of stockpile destruction of anti-personnel mines and demining. It has provided annual voluntary Article 7 reports to the APMB regularly over the past decade. It has not, however, indicated when it might complete mine clearance.

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 (for 2014), Form C.

4 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 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.

5 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2018), Form D.

6 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2018), Form H; and AFRICOM, “Humanitarian Mine Action increases demining capacity in Morocco”, 2 May 2019, at: bit.ly/2LltXKS.

7 Voluntary Article 7 Report, (for 2018), Form D.

8 Statement of Morocco, APMB 16th Meeting of States Parties, Vienna, 21 December 2017.

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

10 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2018), Form C.

11 Voluntary Article 7 Report (for 2017), Form C.

12 “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara”, UN doc. S/2018/889, 3 October 2018, para. 48.

13 “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara”, UN doc. S/2018/277, 29 March 2018, para. 43.

14 Statement of Morocco, Intersessional Meetings, Geneva, 24 June 2019.

15 “Morocco to Deploy Highly Qualified Team to Remove Sahara Landmines”, Sahara Question, 25 March 2016, at: bit.ly/2Ltu9d4.