



Press Release

United Nations Mine Action Service
Gaza
8 April 2015

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION, "MORE THAN MINES", GAZA

Khan Yunis, Gaza (8 April 2015): The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) organized an event in Gaza, attended by thousands of people in Khan Yunis, to celebrate the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. Mohammed Assaf, UNRWA Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees was the special guest and gave a performance.

In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly declared that 4 April of each year shall be observed as the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. This Day calls for more efforts to reduce the threat and impact of mines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) on peace and security, humanitarian relief, human rights, and socio-economic development.

The event took place at UNRWA Khan Yunis training college and involved a series of sporting events, including football, volleyball, athletics and a wheelchair race. All of the events were supported by sports clubs in Gaza, with the objective to raise awareness on the ERW contamination in Gaza as well as on the rights of survivors from ERW-related accidents. Mohammed Assaf sang two songs, dedicated to the civilians whose lives are affected by mines and ERW.

The event began with welcoming messages from UNMAS and the following guests:

- The United Nations Resident Coordinator James Rawley referred to the message of the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and called for continuous support for clearance of ERW, risk education and victim assistance;

Quote 1: "Today's gathering is to get a step closer to the UN's vision of "a world free of the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance, where individuals and communities live in a safe environment conducive to development, and where mine survivors are fully integrated into their societies."

Quote 2: "Allow me to also thank the Governments of the Netherlands, Italy, the UK, Japan, the US, Switzerland, Estonia, and Denmark for their financial support to UNMAS and request their continued financial and political support to ensure the removal of explosives, clearance of areas, risk education and victim assistance."

- UNRWA Director of Operations Robert Turner thanked UNMAS for its support to UNRWA during and after the escalation of hostilities last year, in response to the directive of the United Nations Secretary-General on 23 of July;

Quote: "UNMAS presence was absolutely critical in allowing us to continue our operations during the summer conflict and to very rapidly restart our regular operations through inspection and ERW clearance from our installations. This is particularly true for our school buildings, which allowed us to welcome 240,000 children in our schools only 3 weeks after the announcement of the ceasefire"

- UNRWA Regional Youth Ambassador for Palestine Refugees Mohammad Assaf explained his presence and support to this Day. He also highlighted the importance of supporting access of ERW victims to medical care, rehabilitation services and to all human rights.

Quote: "A war is not over if children cannot play and go to school without the fear of these weapons" he said.

Awareness activities on the ERW contamination of the Gaza Strip and the related activities to mitigate their threat, area also being conducted in Geneva and New York through photo and drawing exhibitions.

International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

"The theme for this year's Day -- "More than Mines" -- reflects the reality faced by civilians, humanitarians, peacekeepers and development agencies in war-zones and countries recovering from conflict. When explosive hazards block the way, food is not delivered; refugees and internally displaced people cannot safely return home; children cannot go to school; development and peacebuilding efforts are hindered; peacekeeping operations cannot deploy safely" said the **United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**.

ERW contamination in Gaza

In Gaza, ERW present a significant risk for civilians and hamper humanitarian and reconstruction operations. The latest escalation of hostilities in Gaza caused unprecedented damage and destruction, leaving an estimated 7,000 ERWs and other explosive hazards buried amidst the rubble, a significantly higher level of contamination than in previous conflicts. ERW accidents have increased significantly since August 2014; in the last eight months, 11 persons have been killed and 40 injured.

The local authorities, UNMAS, UNRWA, UNICEF, the Handicap International and the International Committee of the Red Cross have been working at (1) assessing and securing infrastructures affected by the conflict, (2) educating at risk communities and children to the risk of ERWs, (3) supporting the victims of ERW-related accidents.

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