



## Press Release

United Nations Mine Action Service

Jerusalem

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### **UNITED NATIONS MINE ACTION SERVICE CLEARS LAST KNOWN UNEXPLODED AERIAL BOMB FROM GAZA**

In April 2017, United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) cleared the last known accessible unexploded aerial bomb in Gaza, marking an important milestone in addressing the legacy of unexploded ordnance contamination in Gaza. Since the 2014 conflict Operation Protective Edge, UNMAS has cleared and destroyed 29 tonnes of explosive material derived from 149 unexploded aerial bombs in Gaza. This important work protects both Gaza communities directly impacted by the presence of unexploded ordnance, as well as the wider region through the removal and destruction of explosives materials which may be harvested and reused for improvised explosive devices.

The presence of explosive hazards within destroyed or damaged buildings impeded the clean-up and reconstruction and further obstructed socio-economic development. With reconstruction and rehabilitation projects ongoing, it was imperative that both buried and surface lying aerial bombs were cleared before a building could be manually and mechanically processed, to avoid accidental detonation of unexploded ordnance.

Clearance of unexploded bombs has allowed a sense of security to return to families and communities living, farming and building in areas they knew – or feared - to be contaminated. For example, reconstruction workers were unable to safely clear the collapsed remains of three-story property belonging to Mr. Ibrahim Mafouz Al Farra leaving the three families who had lived there internally displaced. UNMAS determined that multiple bombs had landed on the property, and after weeks of careful rubble removal an UNMAS explosive ordnance disposal Technician working on the site reached the rear of an unexploded 227 Kg aerial bomb some 11 vertical metres underground. He found the fuse unit “armed” and solidly jammed in the body of the



bomb due to its deformation upon impact. Following the clearance of this and one other bomb found at the same location, Mr. Al Farra and his neighbors were able to begin rebuilding their homes. As the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has noted, “Mine action is an investment in humanity. It helps nurture peaceful societies, where those in need can receive aid, and refugees and internally displaced persons can safely return home, and children can go to school.”

The clearance of aerial bombs, the largest of which weighed almost one metric ton with an explosion radius of 1.9kms, required experienced personnel to undertake specialized procedures, such as the detection, mechanical and manual excavation, identification, render safe, recovery, and disposal. In recognition of this work, UNMAS explosive ordnance disposal personnel received a Courage Award from the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in November 2016, for disarming aerial bombs.

Ms. Agnès Marcaillou, UNMAS Director, emphasizes that *“This project illustrates what UNMAS does best : driven by needs, putting people at the centre of the humanitarian response, gaining the trust of all parties”*.

While clearance of the last known accessible aerial bombs is an important achievement, as in any post conflict environment, unexploded ordnance will continue to be unearthed and discovered many decades after conflict has ended. This residual threat from undiscovered contamination and the possibility of renewed escalation of hostilities, necessitate a continued, albeit scaled-down UNMAS capacity. For this reason, UNMAS will maintain a presence to continue to support the humanitarian and development community.

UNMAS recognizes the generous contribution of the following donors who have supported the clearance of aerial bombs since August 2014: Japan, the European Union, Italy, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the United States, Estonia, Poland and Denmark.

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