

The HALO Trust in Libya

HALO has been present in Libya since November 2018. As the only humanitarian organisation to focus on large-scale mine clearance, HALO is pioneering mechanical clearance in urban areas. Despite previous efforts by several humanitarian mine action organisations to remove unexploded ordnance and provide risk education to those living in areas impacted by explosive remnants of war (ERW), the technical knowledge for large-scale clearance was missing. Drawing on its 30 years of experience in mechanical clearance, HALO has introduced the equipment and skills necessary to work systematically through potentially contaminated rubble and collapsed buildings.

In 2020, HALO's work in Libya is supported by the British Embassy in Tripoli (CSSF), EU, UNMAS, German Federal Foreign Office, and the US Department of State/PMWRA.

Our activities in Libya include:

Pioneering Mechanical Clearance

Mechanical clearance operations currently focus on the coastal city of Sirte, the former Gaddafi stronghold and last bastion of Daesh in North Africa until their defeat in 2016. Supported by the British Embassy in Tripoli and the European Union, HALO deployed the first mechanical clearance teams to ever operate in Libya. Despite ongoing conflict, HALO drew upon its acceptance with the local community and authorities to recruit and train people from the city of Sirte. HALO procured heavy machinery in country and armoured it in Misrata according to International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). Mechanical mine clearance teams consist of both mechanical operators, who are trained in safe and efficient handling of heavy machinery, as well as manual clearance teams, who are trained in inspecting potentially contaminated spoil using specialised equipment including metal detectors and protective gear. The combination of people and machines allows the clearance of potentially contaminated land and its safe release back to the community according to IMAS. Supported by PM/WRA, HALO is now introducing mechanical clearance capacity to southern Tripoli.

IM, Mapping, and Survey Capacity

Drawing on HALO's global experience in using satellite imagery and GIS and mapping software for accurate planning of clearance work in hard-to-reach places, HALO has been investigating and mapping hundreds of conflict events and suspected ERW contamination along the former frontlines in southern Tripoli through open source data collection.¹ This project is supported by the UK, EU, and UNMAS. In anticipation of the end of fighting, the data collected now forms the basis for the emergency survey prioritisation plan directly supporting the Libyan Mine Action Centre (LibMAC). Following the liberation of Tripoli, HALO trained up two survey teams, capable of recognising and marking newly identified types of explosive ordnance, including tripwire threats and anti-personnel and antivehicle mines. Effective survey allows the cost-efficient allocation of manual clearance resources and mechanical assets to confirmed hazardous areas.

Manual Clearance

With 9,000 staff working around the world each day clearing landmines, HALO has experience in clearing all types of contamination. With the support of Germany and the US, HALO is set to recruit and train manual clearance teams to begin clearing newly identified explosive ordnance and mines in southern Tripoli.

Misrata Ammunition Storage Explosion Technical Assessment

¹ The project database is accessible here and updated as data collection continues:

<https://gis.halotrust.org/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=ed883b5e32d74325bfb060b973674c44>.

On 06 May, an ammunition store located close to Misrata airport exploded. Consisting of 30 bunkers in varying states of decay with munitions including missiles, rockets and air dropped weapons dating back to the Gaddafi regime, explosions at the ammunition storage area (ASA) continued for several days afterwards, as different kinds of munitions cooked off due to the immense heat. Within hours of the explosion, HALO together with the LibMAC undertook a technical assessment and provided a detailed clearance report to enable the area to be made safe.

Capacity building with the LibMAC

HALO was invited to Libya by the LibMAC and has fostered capacity building of the national mine action authorities ever since, including by introducing quality control procedures for mechanical clearance and survey and formalising the land release process for mechanically cleared land.

Creating local employment

HALO's strategy in Libya is one of transparency, engagement with and acceptance from the community. Most notably, this means that HALO does not rely on external security providers or certain armed groups for protection but maintains close working relationships with key national actors for information-sharing and cooperation. As a result, HALO has built a favourable reputation as a trusted and neutral humanitarian service provider, which enables safe and unimpeded access to task sites. By factoring conflict sensitivity based on localised conflict analyses into all operations, HALO has been able to maintain uninterrupted presence in country since 2018.

Wherever possible, HALO implements a local recruitment and capacity-building model in preference to employing large numbers of international staff. In Libya, HALO's international footprint is minimal. Rather, HALO creates local employment opportunities for various skill levels while offering on-the-job training according to IMAS standards. HALO's mechanical clearance staff cover a broad age range and are representative of the tribally diverse community in Sirte. In Tripoli, staff are recruited directly from mine-impacted communities. Most importantly, in post-revolution Libya where employment opportunities remain scarce and young men are at risk of being recruited by armed groups, working for HALO offers a viable alternative to earn a living.

HALO runs all training in-country, drawing on its global specialists who are available to run training in Libya on all aspects of mine clearance, including Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD).