

## UNMAS Palestine in Gaza, 2015-2020



### **Achievements**

- 129,324 persons (including 83,843 children) have gained knowledge of the risks associated with explosive ordnance, leading to behaviour change that could potentially save their lives. This was achieved through 4,511 EORE sessions.
- 15,041 beneficiaries gained Conflict Preparedness and Protection knowledge thanks to their participation in 603 CPP sessions
- 3,596 COVID19-ERW mixed sessions were given to 10,149 beneficiaries including 4,053 children. This strengthened their understanding and knowledge of the ongoing pandemic alongside the risks of explosive ordnance.
- Community can now safely use a wide range of facilities due to the risk assessments conducted on 839 infrastructure and reconstruction projects.

Since 2015, the Republic of Poland has financially supported mine action in Gaza through the ongoing Gaza Emergency Response project. The contributions amounting to 287,483.55 USD, including Poland's recent contribution for 2020, have allowed UNMAS to respond to the risks posed by Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA) and support Gaza civilians in mitigating the risks that they face in their community.

### **Context**

The situation in Gaza has been described as a protracted humanitarian crisis by the United Nations Special Coordinator who has repeatedly warned the international community that without resolution of the structural sources of conflict, such as the lack of political settlement and the continued blockade of



Gaza, the possibility of recurrent hostilities between Israel and Gaza will remain persistent.

The 2014 escalation of hostilities between Israel and Gaza (8 July - 26 August 2014) caused unprecedented damage and destruction in Gaza. It left behind significant levels of contamination much higher than previous conflicts. Since the 2014 conflict, UNMAS has recorded a total 7,324 Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) that have been cleared and destroyed in Gaza to date. The current level of ERW contamination is impossible to determine; however, on average since 2017, there are still approximately 100 items of ERW cleared every month though ERW accidents continue to occur with frequency. The most recent escalation between 11-12 August 2020 resulted in contamination of a school in Gaza by an unexploded missile.

The ongoing security situation in Gaza is extremely dangerous for local communities as new rounds of military confrontations increase explosive hazards. ERW continue to cause casualties in Gaza resulting in an increasing number of people requiring survivor assistance, especially since the start of the demonstrations in March 2018 as part of the Great March of Return. There is concern amongst mine action partners of a marked increase in complacency and desensitization to the risks of ERW amongst the Gaza population leading to these accidents. There also exists a gap in the capacity and resources of the Gazan authorities to respond appropriately to the existing ERW contamination. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many restrictions in movement and caused subsequent difficulties in being able to reach our beneficiaries. To ensure social distancing policies were being followed normal Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) activities were suspended, to give way to the implementation of specialised street sessions covering both ERW and COVID-19 safety messaging. The messaging was developed in consultation with WHO and UNICEF to ensure that it was accurate and easy to understand.

### ***Summary of achievements since 2015***

In line with its Country Programme Strategy for Palestine, UNMAS is focused on two outcomes:

1. The UN, and its humanitarian partners in Gaza, main critical functions, uninhibited by explosive hazards;
2. People know how to mitigate the risk of explosive ordnance

In the West Bank this is focused on capacity enhancement of the National Mine Action Authority and their ability to implement the Palestinian Authority's obligations under the APMBT and in Gaza this is focused on the provision or emergency Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) support to the UN and UNRWA project sites while providing EORE for the protection of civilians

In Gaza, UNMAS provides an emergency EOD response to allow the United Nations and its humanitarian partners in Gaza to maintain critical functions, uninhibited by explosive hazards. An EOD response or callout involves UNMAS clearing UN premises that have suspected or confirmed ERW contamination after airstrikes or other military engagements. UNMAS manages sites while coordinating with the EOD police to remove and dispose of any explosive items to enable the site to re-open and continue



implementing humanitarian activities. Since 2009, these interventions have been a vital part of the Gaza Inter-Agency Contingency Plan. In the UN's Programme Criticality framework for Gaza, UNMAS EOD activities have been recognized as "Programme Criticality 1" (PC1) by the UNCT. PC1 activities are considered most critical and implementation is associated with very high levels of residual risk to UN personnel and assets.

For the protection of civilians under UNMAS global mandate, UNMAS provides different types of EORE to mitigate the risk of explosive ordnance. Sessions include pre-coordinated community sessions, training for professionals including UN staff and humanitarian partners, street sessions aimed at reaching beneficiaries who are not reached otherwise, and reconstruction EORE sessions that are aimed at construction workers on sites and are provided on request. UNMAS also delivers Conflict Preparedness and Protection (CPP) resilience training to empower females in the community to understand the risks and how to make decisions regarding preparing the home for bombardment. Since 2015, UNMAS reached 129,324 persons via 4,511 EORE sessions, including 83,843 children and a further 603 CPP sessions have been delivered to 15,041 beneficiaries, including 11,832 women. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNMAS has suspended normal EORE activities and begun implementing specialised street sessions covering both ERW and COVID-19 safety messaging. In this context, 3,596 COVID19-ERW mixed sessions have been implemented reaching 10,149 beneficiaries including 4,053 children.

UNMAS supports social stabilization by facilitating the reconstruction of vital infrastructure and housing. Due to the widespread historical ERW contamination in Gaza, to ensure the safety and security of construction site workers and to satisfy health and safety requirements UNMAS has carried out ERW risk assessments at sites identified for construction and development. Since 2015, UNMAS has responded to requests from partners for risk assessments on 839 infrastructure and reconstruction projects. Partners included MDLF, UNICEF, UNRWA and the Palestine Water Authority on projects related to road renovation, sewage networks, water pipe installation and structural construction. Going forward, UNMAS will no longer be able to provide this service to the development partners in Gaza due to lack of funding to cover the costs of these activities. UNMAS is exploring options with the UNCT and other development actors to allow continuation of those services on a cost recovery basis only.

### ***Looking forward***

UNMAS is facing significant funding issues that have led to the need re-focus on the strategic objectives in Gaza. This has been achieved by re-structuring the programme down to a 4-person emergency EOD response team in Gaza to deliver UNMAS' mandate of protection of civilians and UN personnel and property in Gaza. UNMAS has welcomed the receipt 200,000 Zloty from the Government of Poland from the 2020 allocation. Italy has pledged EUR 140,733, and UNMAS has allocated US\$ 200,000 to the Gaza response from unearmarked funding from Denmark and the Netherlands, which will extend funding for the Gaza Emergency response until June 2021. UNMAS Palestine still requires US\$ 294,000 to sustain its emergency operations in Gaza until the end of 2021 and is currently in discussion with the UNCT to find a sustainable solution for the provision of EOD capacity to the UN in Gaza beyond 2021.