

MINE ACTION **OCCUPIED** **PALESTINIAN** **TERRITORY**

Stories of Hope



MINE ACTION **OCCUPIED** **PALESTINIAN** **TERRITORY**

Stories of Hope



CONTENTS

How mine action saves lives and supports recovery in Gaza and the West Bank	5
Restoring community agricultural initiatives	6
Victim Assistance: From reporting to response	8
Youth Committees as Agents of Change in Explosive Ordnance Risk Education in the West Bank	10
Gaza city: living among rubble and the threat of explosive ordnance	12
Raising awareness of explosive threats among children	14
Leading the Way for Humanitarian Aid: UNMAS Road Clearance Supporting WFP Food Delivery in Gaza City	16
Learning Through Play - Integrating Risk Education and Psychosocial Support in School-Based Programming	18
Despite these efforts, people in Gaza and the West Bank are forced to navigate explosive threats every day. Mine action partners have the expertise to make communities safer, but we need support.	20



HOW MINE ACTION SAVES LIVES AND SUPPORTS RECOVERY IN GAZA AND THE WEST BANK

Over the past two and a half years, explosive ordnance contamination across the Occupied Palestinian Territory has proliferated. In Gaza, although unable to assess all areas of the Strip, partners have encountered over 1,000 dangerous items while carrying out their daily missions. Meanwhile in the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority identified 255 explosive ordnance items in the first four months of 2026, already surpassing the total found in all of 2023.

Aside from the threat to life and limb, the presence of explosive ordnance shrinks the already restricted space available for humanitarian and civilian activities. Even the potential presence of explosive ordnance restricts the space that people can use for livelihood activities, stalls humanitarian delivery, and makes everyday activities – like collecting firewood, setting up shelters, or going to the market – more dangerous.

Since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023, humanitarian mine action partners have worked with communities and humanitarian partners to minimize the impact of explosive ordnance contamination. By teaching communities and humanitarian personnel about explosive threats, assessing places and roads for these threats, and supporting people who have been injured by ordnance and their families, the sector aims to support people to navigate explosive threats more safely.

There is still much to be done. Contamination remains extensive, with dangerous items continuing to be found on roads, in shelters, or buried among debris. Addressing this is a key hurdle to safe and sustainable development and, eventually, peace in Gaza and the West Bank. The mine action sector will continue working with partners to expand the response and advocate for the critical equipment and clearances needed to dispose of ordnance, with the goal of eliminating threats altogether for communities. In the meantime, we continue to support community safety, facilitate humanitarian delivery and enable safe early recovery efforts.

Behind this stark context lie human lives caught in the balance. The following pages share the stories of communities, humanitarians, and youth leaders who are reclaiming their futures. They offer a glimpse into how mine action goes beyond technical assessments, playing a critical enabling role for humanitarian, early recovery and civilian interventions.



RESTORING COMMUNITY AGRICULTURAL INITIATIVES

El-Sheikh Ejleen, located along Gaza's coastal road, has long stood as one of the most fertile agricultural areas in the Gaza Strip. Farmers in this area grow some of the finest grapes and figs, along with a wide variety of vegetables such as cauliflower, courgette, aubergine, green beans, cabbage, herbs, mint, and citrus fruits. For generations, families have depended on this land, building a deep connection with the soil that defines both their livelihoods and identity.

The area faced extensive damage during the escalation, destroying infrastructure and forcing residents to leave. The destruction of this key agricultural hub aided in the deteriorating levels of food security across Gaza, making an already severe crisis even more difficult.

When residents returned after the ceasefire in October 2025, they came back with determination but without resources. They set up tents and tried to restart farming. However, explosive ordnance covered the land, creating a dangerous environment that prevented safe cultivation.

To support the recovery of El-Sheikh Ejleen, Oxfam requested UNMAS assessments, and UNMAS responded quickly. Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams deployed to the

area and conducted assessments across nine large agricultural zones comprising 150,000 square meters. Explosive ordnance disposal officers identified large quantities of dangerous explosive items in the soil, which they marked and cordoned off so that the rest of the land could be used safely. Working closely with the community and coordinating with partners to support safe agricultural recovery, the work ensured that farmers could safely return to their land.

As the work progressed, farmers gradually resumed planting. Fields that once showed destruction began to turn green again. Crops started to grow, and the land began to regain its productivity.

One elderly farmer shared:

"After the destruction of my house and the scraping of my land, I felt there was no reason to wake up in the morning. Now, I wait for dawn with impatience to plant my land and take care of my crops. Life has returned to my soul."



Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officers assess open land for explosive ordnance threats, to ensure that farming activities can go ahead safely.



Farmers begin growing vegetables on land assessed by Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officers, to feed surrounding communities.

VICTIM ASSISTANCE: FROM REPORTING TO RESPONSE

Since the conflict in Gaza began in October 2023, levels of conflict-related disability have dramatically increased. More than 172,967 people have been injured, with at least 42,000 sustaining life-changing injuries, including the loss of limbs and blast-related sensory impairments like hearing loss. Rehabilitation centres have been destroyed or closed, mobility devices have been lost, and specialized medical and support services are often inaccessible. Many persons with disabilities cannot evacuate dangerous areas because they lack wheelchairs, prosthetics or caregiver support.

To date, UNMAS has received reports of more than a thousand people injured by explosive weapons (a figure which is likely underreported), with most requiring extensive support. Once UNMAS receives a report through its online system, Danish Refugee Council (DRC) steps in, conducting a comprehensive individual assessment, identifying available services and how to access them, and referring people to medical care, psychosocial support, shelter, and socio-economic assistance. Currently, Victim Assistance actions include cash support, supporting those with life-changing injuries to navigate the impact of these accidents.

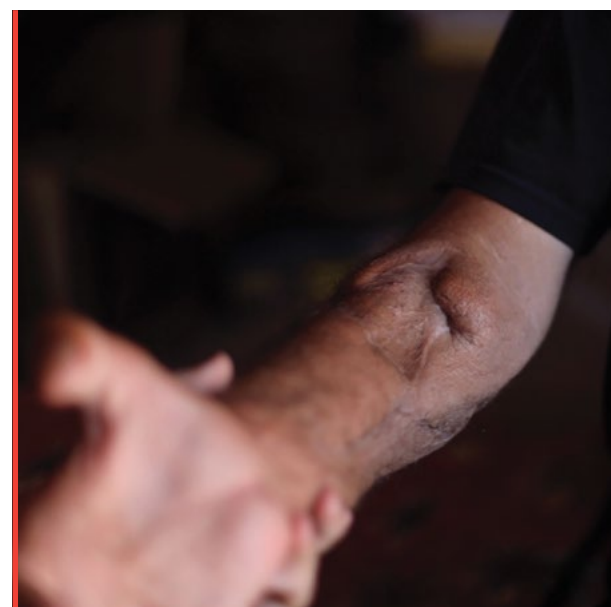
Ahmed, an elderly man, was wounded multiple times: four separate conflict-related injuries between January 2024 and June 2025 destroyed the use of his dominant arm and left fragments embedded under his skin. He now suffers with chronic pain and is facing financial

difficulties. Displaced with seven relatives, he lives in an overcrowded tent and cannot access the specialized surgery he requires. He received a one-off cash grant from DRC, which he used to buy medicine, food, and hygiene supplies, as well as mattresses for his family's temporary shelter. He has also set aside a portion of the grant to start selling basic goods, hoping to restore even a minimal level of household income. In addition, he was referred to mental health and psychosocial support services, medical follow-up options, and shelter assistance pathways. While this support was meaningful and helped the family regain temporary stability, it remains far from sufficient to meet his continuing medical, psychosocial, and economic needs.

His case reflects the consequences of explosive weapons in densely populated areas and illustrates the gaps between commitment and reality in the implementation of the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas. Victim Assistance is not only about clinical recovery: every intervention is an act of recognition, restoring dignity and agency for persons with disabilities caused by conflict. The needs of explosive ordnance victims constitute a profound human tragedy layered on top of a humanitarian catastrophe, requiring sustainable access for humanitarian actors and long-term investment for people to heal and to rebuild the possibility of safe civilian life.



Ahmed, a survivor of repeated explosive weapon attacks, walks with the DRC Victim Assistance Specialist through his displacement site in Khan Younis, Gaza, October 2025



DRC Victim Assistance Specialist conducts a medical assessment visit of a victim of the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas following the provision of assistance in a displacement camp in Khan Younis, Gaza, October 2025

TOTAL PEOPLE INJURED
SINCE OCT 2023:

172,967

PEOPLE WITH
LIFE-CHANGING INJURIES:

42,000+



YOUTH COMMITTEES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE IN EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE RISK EDUCATION IN THE WEST BANK

Across the West Bank, youth committees have emerged as a powerful force in explosive ordnance risk education, transforming volunteerism into civic leadership in some of the region's most vulnerable communities. Through UNMAS-supported training delivered with PalVision, 105 young volunteers, 75 women and 40 men, have been equipped to deliver life-saving messages across Jenin, the Jordan Valley, Masafer Yatta, Tubas, and Tulkarm. For many, this work is rooted in a deep sense of duty to protect their communities:

"Volunteering isn't just time we give, it's the impact we leave behind,"

explains Doaa, 24. Others describe explosive ordnance awareness not as technical instruction but as an act of humanity, compassion, and courage.

The youth facilitators have become trusted messengers in sensitive areas where people live with daily exposure to explosive ordnance. Their sessions, delivered in homes, schools, tents, and community centers, combine clear messaging, empathy, and locally grounded communication. Female volunteers in particular have stepped into critical frontline roles, reaching mothers, caregivers, and children in ways that only they can.

"Sometimes a single word from a woman or a simple hand gesture can be enough to save a child,"

reflects Leila, 28. Meanwhile young volunteers like Yasmeen and Taqwa learned how to listen deeply, open dialogue, and respond to fears that families rarely voice aloud.

Beyond technical knowledge, the initiative has cultivated confidence, purpose, and a profound sense of belonging among youth participants. Many had never spoken publicly before, yet now they lead awareness sessions that can determine whether a child picks up a dangerous object, or walks away. Wassim, 21, captured this transformation:

"I took the leap, overcame my fear, and realized how powerful this experience can be... every smile from a child gave me pride I can't describe."

For others, the work has become a lifelong commitment to community safety and peace. As Yamamah, 22, expressed,

"I learned how I can make an impact, even with just a word, in protecting others and saving lives we may never know."

Through their collective efforts, these young volunteers are not only raising awareness, they are building resilient, informed communities and becoming the next generation of leaders standing at the heart of protection in the West Bank.



A young risk education facilitator teaches community members about the dangers of explosive ordnance threats in the West Bank.



GAZA CITY: LIVING AMONG RUBBLE AND THE THREAT OF EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE

After more than two years of conflict, Gaza residents continue to live among more than 60 million tonnes of rubble. Around the damaged Rashad al-Shawa Cultural Center in Gaza city, tents stand between the rubble of collapsed walls. Explosive ordnance often hides under this debris, posing a life-threatening risk to those living in the area, especially to children who often get hurt while playing with these small objects. These items are also a threat to humanitarian and early recovery workers, hindering aid delivery and rubble removal operations.

In January 2026, under UNMAS tasking, a HALO team responded to a request from UNDP who wanted to support the recovery of the site, including improving the shelter services available

to displaced persons living there. The HALO team assessed the site, issuing recommendations for the communities living there and for rubble removal teams to operate safely, once they are on site. These assessments facilitate UNDP to prioritize their early recovery operations: sites of low and medium risk are considered for debris management operations to commence, while high risk are not, pending further explosive ordnance risk mitigation.

Through an ongoing partnership with the MA'AN Development Center, HALO assessments were combined with emergency explosive ordnance risk education sessions delivered by MA'AN teams to the communities that continue to live in the sites assessed.



Families continue to live among the rubble of the Rashad al-Shawa Cultural Center, Gaza City, January 2026

"After losing my home, I now lead a camp of 170 families in Deir al Balah. Explosive Ordnance Risk Education showed me how to recognise explosive hazards and keep children away from danger. As a camp leader, I can pass this knowledge on to protect more than just my own family."

Hassan,
after attending a HALO-MA'AN risk education session in Deir al Balah, March 2026.

HALO EOD Team Leader conducting an explosive hazard assessment at a cultural centre in Gaza City, January 2026.





RAISING AWARENESS OF EXPLOSIVE THREATS AMONG CHILDREN

Yousef is a displaced child living in Al-Nuseirat Camp. Like many children, he used to visit his family's destroyed home in Deir al Balah almost every day with his father, brother, and cousin. He would play around the area and collect items from the rubble, not fully understanding the risks.

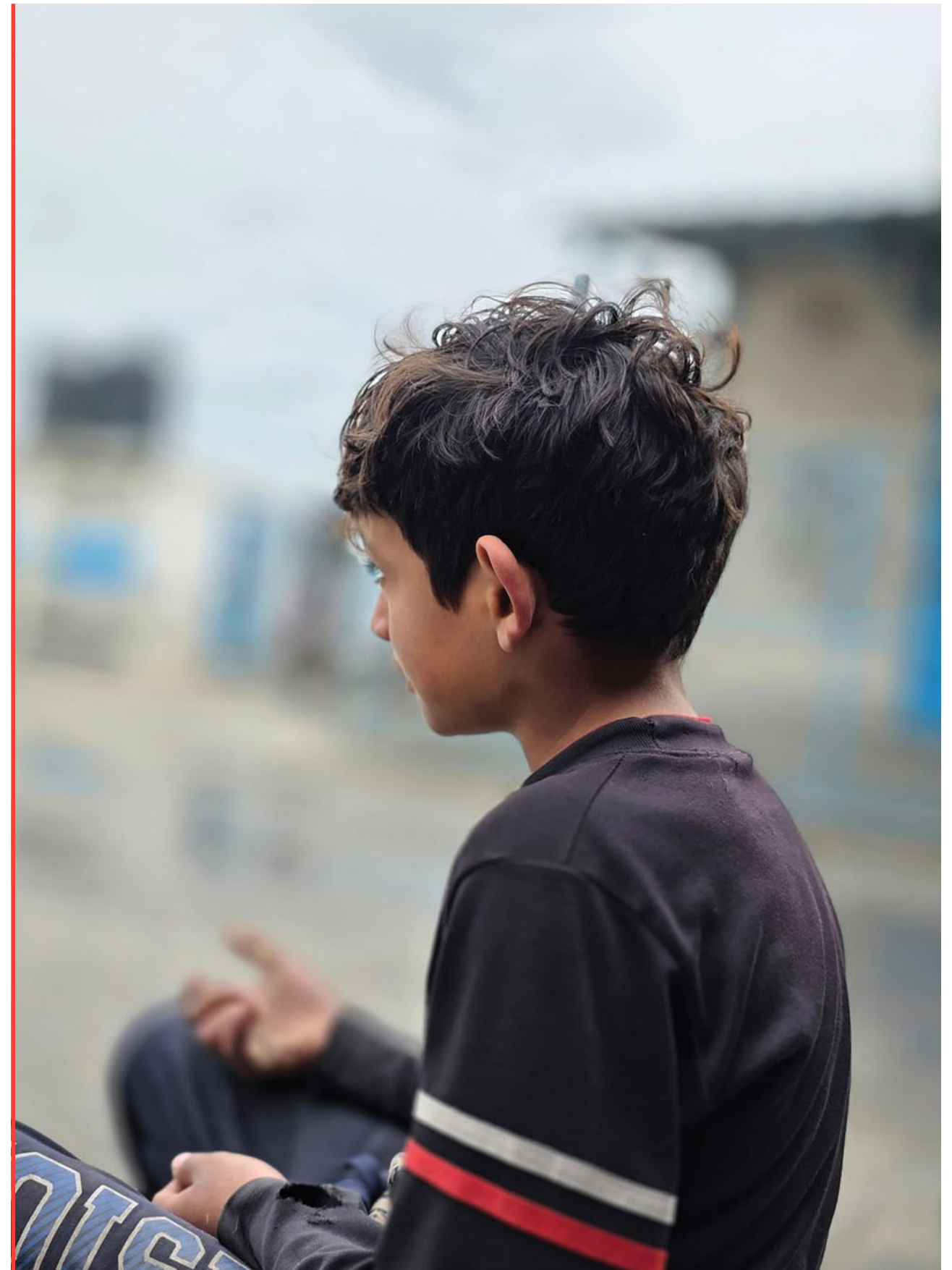
During one visit, they found what they thought was a piece of asbestos. It later turned out to be an explosive remnant of war. The outcome could have been tragic. Yousef continued going back to the area, still ignoring what it was and unaware of how dangerous it could be.

After attending explosive ordnance risk education sessions, things started to change. Yousef became aware of the risks around him and began to act more carefully in his daily life.

He also shared what he learned with others and advised his friends not to pick up suspicious objects. Now aware of certain areas in the Gaza Strip considered particularly contaminated, he advised his friends to avoid these unsafe areas.

His parents noticed a clear difference in his behaviour since Yousef attended the sessions. They were surprised to see that especially since their own efforts to guide him away from these dangers had not been as effective. The sessions helped Yousef better understand the risks and take them seriously.

Today, Yousef is not only keeping himself safer, but also helping others do the same.



Yousef attended a Risk Education session where he learned about the risk of touching unfamiliar objects, and vowed to teach others what he learned.



LEADING THE WAY FOR HUMANITARIAN AID: UNMAS ROAD CLEARANCE SUPPORTING WFP FOOD DELIVERY IN GAZA CITY

In Gaza city, where conflict left critical infrastructure damaged and essential routes obstructed, humanitarian access remains a lifeline for communities. UNMAS plays a vital role in enabling safe passage for aid convoys through explosive ordnance assessments and risk mitigation guidance.

In September 2025, UNMAS support was requested along a key supply route designated for the World Food Programme (WFP) to deliver emergency food assistance. The road was essential for WFP convoys carrying bulk food assistance into Gaza city. However, the route had been rendered inaccessible due to the suspected presence of explosive ordnance. Without support, WFP's ability to move food supplies into the area was severely restricted, placing thousands of families at heightened risk of hunger.

During the operation, UNMAS located and safely marked three dangerous explosive ordnance items, eliminating immediate threats to humanitarian traffic.

With the route declared safe, WFP was able to resume humanitarian convoys into Gaza city. Each truck on this cleared route carried enough food to support 500 families for one month.

By enabling the movement of multiple trucks, this clearance operation directly contributed to:

- Restoring access for food delivery in a highly vulnerable area;
- Supporting thousands of civilians facing acute food insecurity;
- Reducing humanitarian risk for aid workers and beneficiaries.

This case demonstrates how mine action is a lifesaving enabler of humanitarian aid delivery. By assessing a single critical road and minimizing the risk of three explosive threats, UNMAS directly restored access for WFP food convoys at a time when thousands of families in Gaza City faced the daily fear of hunger and the risk of starvation.



An EOD Officer marking an explosive ordnance item to prevent communities from approaching this dangerous hazard. September 2025.



An EOD Officer examining an explosive ordnance item. September 2025.



LEARNING THROUGH PLAY - INTEGRATING RISK EDUCATION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMING

In March 2026, UNMAS implementing partners Save Youth Future Society and PalVision conducted a school-based explosive ordnance risk education activity using a learning-through-play pedagogical approach. The intervention reached more than 175 students and formed part of broader efforts to integrate trauma-sensitive mental health and psychosocial support integrated risk education within educational settings in Gaza. Recognizing that children in conflict-affected environments often experience heightened stress and exposure to risk, the activity combined life-saving safety messaging with creative expression through a structured drawing exercise. This approach allowed children to engage with explosive ordnance safety concepts while providing a supportive outlet to express emotions and experiences through art.

The activity demonstrated how learning through play can serve as an effective pedagogical tool for risk education, enabling children to internalize

safety behaviours in a manner that is age-appropriate, participatory, and psychologically supportive. Rather than relying solely on didactic instruction, students translated key safety messages into drawings, reinforcing their understanding of safe behaviours such as avoiding suspicious objects and reporting hazards. Meanwhile, partnerships with organizations such as Atfaluna Society for People with Disabilities ensured that the activity promoted accessibility and inclusion for children with disabilities. Kinda, 13, from Hebron in the West Bank, said: "I learned not to approach any unknown object and to protect myself, especially while playing. I should play only in safe and known areas." In Gaza, the artwork was displayed in the school, extending the reach of awareness messages beyond the immediate participants and encouraging curiosity, peer discussion, and informal learning among other students and visitors.

Explore the exhibition [here](#).



Young people in the West Bank paint warning signs as part of awareness-raising activities. March 2026.



Children in Gaza admire their handmade warning signs displayed at a school in Gaza city. March 2026.

DESPITE THESE EFFORTS, PEOPLE IN GAZA AND THE WEST BANK ARE FORCED TO NAVIGATE EXPLOSIVE THREATS EVERY DAY. MINE ACTION PARTNERS HAVE THE EXPERTISE TO MAKE COMMUNITIES SAFER, BUT WE NEED SUPPORT.

We call on stakeholders to:



Ensure unimpeded entry of critical equipment and clearances to conduct the full range of explosive ordnance disposal activities;



Ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian staff, including international explosive ordnance disposal operators;



Secure responsive funding to help partners respond to rapid context changes;



Advocate for parties to uphold obligations under the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas and Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Protocol V.

Other resources to explore:

- [UNMAS exhibition 'Signs of Safety'](#)
- [UNMAS OPT 2025 Annual Report](#)
- [Video: Creating Safe Pathways](#)
- [Explosive Ordnance threat factsheet](#)
- [UNMAS website](#)
- [MA AoR OPT website](#)

For more information, contact:

- Julius Vanderwalt, Chief of Mine Action Programme in the Occupied Palestinian Territory
- julius.vanderwalt1@un.org
- Kateryna Templeton, Mine Action Area of Responsibility Coordinator
- katerynat@unops.org
- John Edwards, Mine Action Area of Responsibility Coordinator
- j.edwards@hi.org





UNMAS



Global Protection Cluster