



UNMAS

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UNMAS NEWS

GAZA UPDATE

The Crisis

The latest escalation of hostilities between Israel and Gaza (8 July-26 August 2014) caused unprecedented damage and destruction in Gaza. During the hostilities, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) employed over 5,085 airstrikes, 8,210 missiles, 15,736 naval projectiles and 36,718 land projectiles. In addition, armed groups in Gaza fired approximately 4,584 rockets and 1,676 mortars toward Israel, a portion of which fell short and landed within Gaza. As a result, at least 1,563 Palestinian civilians were killed, over 11,100 were injured, and nearly half a million were displaced, more than a quarter of the population. In the fighting, over 22,000 housing units were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, and more than 113,000 homes – 13% of the housing stock in Gaza – were impacted. Furthermore, 17 of Gaza's 32 hospitals reported damage and six closed; four of Gaza's 97 primary health clinics were completely destroyed, and another 42 were damaged, resulting in at least 17 closures. The escalation of hostilities led to the total destruction of 26 of Gaza's schools and caused damage to 122 more, including more than 80 United Nations Relief and Work Agency schools. Economic activity was significantly impacted, with 419 businesses and workshops damaged and 128 completely destroyed. This destruction added to the existing damage from previous conflicts and exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza strip, further degrading already inadequate sanitation capacity, increasing food insecurity, and drastically reducing access to healthcare. Moreover, with an estimated 10% failure rate of munitions used in the conflict, there are an estimated 7,000 explosive remnants of war (ERW) buried in the rubble, representing a significantly higher level of contamination than in previous conflicts. The presence of thousands of ERWs threatens the lives and physical integrity of the population, impedes urgent humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts, and inhibits economic activity and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

BY THE NUMBERS

- **228 UN sites** cleared of ERW
- **All UNRWA and 21 PA Schools cleared**, allowing **250,000 students** to return to class
- **Key infrastructure** sites cleared of ERW, facilitating the humanitarian emergency response
- UNMAS provided **5,300 humanitarians** and at-risk people with **ERW awareness training**
- UNMAS distributed **22,500 ERW alert flyers** to at-risk populations
- UNMAS provided **ERW risk train-the-trainer education** to **1,200 UNRWA teachers**

more than mines

The Mandate

In response to the humanitarian crisis that was unfolding in Gaza, on 23 July 2014, the United Nations Secretary-General directed “the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) to immediately develop and implement an effective security plan for the safe and secure handling of any weapons discovered in UN premises” along with the United Nations Department of Security Services (UNDSS). The United Nations Secretary-General directed UNMAS to “immediately deploy personnel with expertise to deal with this situation.”

In response to his call to action, UNMAS deployed to Gaza on 27 July 2014 as part of the first of a three-phased response to meet emergency humanitarian needs arising from ERW contamination and other explosive hazards in Gaza.

The UNMAS three-phased response plan includes: (A) preliminary assessments and immediate threat mitigation measures; (B) survey and clearance of ERW and other explosive hazards and risk education for populations determined to be at-risk; and (C) systematic survey and clearance operations in support of reconstruction efforts.

When the United Nations launched its Gaza Crisis Appeal on 9 September 2014, the UNMAS intervention was deemed critical for addressing the immediate humanitarian threat to the civilian population and facilitating the reconstruction of Gaza.

UNMAS operates in Gaza under UNRWA’s umbrella. The UNMAS Gaza team provides technical advice and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) support to UNRWA and UN agencies to enable ERW risk assessments and clearance in order to allow safe emergency response and reconstruction efforts. In addition, UNMAS is responsible for task planning, prioritization, and coordination of tasks requested by, or through, UN agencies. Of paramount importance is the responsibility for ensuring that the ERW clearance capacity works in an effective, safe, and time-efficient manner in accordance with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATGs).



A destroyed north Gaza neighbourhood where UNMAS conducted explosive remnants of war risk assessments. (UN Photo)

Progress and Achievements – Emergency and Early Recovery

In its survey and clearance work to date, UNMAS has destroyed thousands of ERWs.

During the emergency response phase of its intervention in Gaza, UNMAS surveyed and cleared 214 sites at the request of United Nations entities to allow humanitarian assistance programmes to proceed safely and efficiently.

In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, UNMAS surveyed and cleared key infrastructure sites that had been damaged or destroyed to ensure that humanitarian and socioeconomic activities could resume quickly, including the Rafah Crossing and the Gaza power plant. UNMAS cleared all UNRWA schools and 21 Palestinian Authority schools, allowing more than 250,000 children to return to school after the end of the hostilities.

UNMAS provided ERW risk education for 5,300 UN staff, humanitarian workers, IDPs, UNRWA teachers, engineers, construction workers, and other at-risk populations. UNMAS has helped raise awareness about ERW hazards by handing out 22,500 ERW alert flyers and booklets to the civilian population living and working in areas contaminated by ERW.

UNMAS launched an ERW risk education training-of-trainers programme for 1,200 teachers at UNRWA schools, who, once they complete their training in February 2015, will serve as a sustainable ERW education force multiplier on the ground.



UNMAS school risk awareness briefings were given inside and outside classrooms. (UN Photo)

Rubble Removal and Reconstruction Support

In December 2014, UNMAS commenced the third phase of its response plan, supporting the reconstruction activities.

Last month, UNMAS started work with the UNDP Rubble Removal project in Shejaayea, one of the most impacted areas in Gaza. In this capacity, UNMAS has provided daily on-site ERW training sessions, risk assessments and EOD support.

To date, UNMAS has cleared 25 areas at the request of UNDP. This support allows rubble removal to progress safely despite the high level of contamination, reducing unnecessary delays created by the real, or suspected, presence of ERW, and as such, allowing Gazans to start the reconstruction of their homes and businesses.

In parallel to the rubble removal and reconstruction support phase, UNMAS continues to work closely with UNICEF, UNRWA, and other international organizations to ensure a widespread delivery of ERW risk education to at-risk populations in the entire Gaza Strip.

Within the Protection Cluster, UNMAS continues to lead the ERW/Mine Action sub-cluster, coordinating all NGOs and UN entities that are involved in this area of responsibility, to ensure that needs are met, duplication is avoided, and messages are consistent and culturally acceptable. UNMAS is providing initiatives and technical expertise, ensuring that all activities are coordinated to maximize coverage.

In the coming months, UNMAS will conduct a communication assessment in order to assess the needs and readjust the overall ERW/ Mine Risk Education (MRE) strategy, including the coverage plan, messages, and tools.



Unexploded bomb at the Rafah Crossing Customs office that was removed by UNMAS. Before the bomb was removed, the crossing was closed. (UN Photo)



UNMAS risk awareness briefing was given to UNRWA workers at the Karni warehouse before they began to clear the area. (UN Photo)

Impact

As a direct result of UNMAS emergency survey, clearance, and education work in Gaza, hundreds of thousands of children have been able to return safely to school. The survey and clearance of key infrastructure sites has allowed for the movement of people and goods, facilitating the return of IDPs and allowing economic and social activities to resume. UNMAS training and awareness programmes have helped empower at-risk populations to identify and safely respond to ERW contamination. With continued UNMAS support for UNDP rubble removal efforts, IDPs will be able to return home and families can begin to rebuild their lives.

Partners

UNMAS has delivered extensive humanitarian support in Gaza over the past five years; UNMAS is the only external entity approved by all parties to deal with explosive hazards in Gaza. UNMAS works closely with UNDP, UNRWA, and UNICEF, as well as NGO partners. UNMAS contributes to the Damage Needs Assessment (Reconstruction Group) led by the World Bank, the European Union and the Palestinian Authority (PA) by providing an analysis of ERW and a related response plan. UNMAS works with all stakeholders in the region, including the PA, which is closely monitoring reconstruction efforts. At the request of the National Office for the Reconstruction of Gaza, UNMAS provides operational updates to the PA, along with other UN and international partners.

Looking Forward

Today, the continued presence of thousands of ERWs in Gaza requires a sustained UNMAS role in the reconstruction efforts.

Without continued survey and clearance work, as well as ERW awareness and education programmes, the humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts will be hindered and Gaza's civilians will remain at risk for ERW accidents. The threat posed by the estimated 7,000 ERWs in Gaza is evidenced by the surge in ERW accidents since September 2014, which have killed 10 people and injured 36.

In light of the continued ERW threat in Gaza, UNMAS projects that its support will be needed through at least the end of 2016.

UNMAS 3 PHASE RESPONSE

- **Phase 1 – Emergency**
July - early December 2014
- **Phase 2 - Early Recovery**
August 2014 – December 2014
- **Phase 3 - Recovery & Reconstruction**
December 2014 – ongoing