



Press release

4 April: International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

## Weapons clearance more complex in areas newly contaminated by conflict

Montreal, 4 April 2019. On World Mine Action Day, HI has expressed its alarm at new contamination due to the widespread use of explosive weapons, in current and recent conflicts, and the growing use of improvised mines. Often located in urban areas, these contaminated zones are more difficult to clear and pose new challenges for humanitarian mine clearance experts. HI implements clearance operations in seven countries: Colombia, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Senegal and Chad. The organisation is also exploring innovative ways to facilitate the work of mine clearance experts, including the use of drones to help detect the presence of explosive devices on the ground.

- 20 years after the entry into force of the Ottawa Treaty on 1 March 1999, the need for mine clearance is enormous: in Iraq, Syria, Ukraine etc. vast swathes of land have been **newly and lastingly contaminated** by bombing, shelling and the use of mines, both industrial and improvised. Published in November 2018, the most recent Landmine Monitor highlights one aspect of **the widespread use of explosive weapons in the world**: the exceptionally high casualties caused by mines, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that are triggered like mines, and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in 2017, for the third year running. **A total of 60 states and other areas have been contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war** around the world.
- Newly contaminated areas are often **complex and take longer to clear** (located in urban areas, hidden under rubble, close to residential areas etc.). The renewed use of improvised mines, which are extremely sensitive and difficult to defuse, complicates the work of mine clearance teams, for example.
- HI works as part of an international effort to clear contaminated areas and achieve a mine-free world: the organisation manages a budget of **more than €21 million for these operations** - one of the largest in the organisation's history.
- HI currently implements weapons clearance operations in **seven countries: Colombia, Iraq, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Senegal and Chad**. **More than 200 HI deminers** - of whom many are women - are currently engaged in clearance work and liberated **more than 350,000 sq.m of land** in 2018, the **equivalent of 50 football fields**. **Nearly 3,500 explosive devices of all kinds** have been secured by HI's teams. HI has been exploring innovative responses to changes in the type of contamination encountered. Since January, for example, HI and its partners have been testing the use of drones in northern Chad to help detect the presence of explosive devices on the ground and make it easier for mine clearance experts to respond.
- According to the 2018 Landmine Monitor report, at least 7,239 people were killed or injured by these weapons in 2017. There were 3,993 casualties in 2014, when casualties rose after a steady 15-year decline. As data is difficult to collect in present and recent conflict zones, the actual number is probably much higher.
- The high total was mostly due to casualties recorded **in countries with armed conflicts or endemic violence**: in 2017, most casualties of factory-made or improvised mines and explosive remnants of war

were reported in Afghanistan (2,300), Syria (1,906), Ukraine (429) and Iraq (304). Casualties were identified in 53 **states and other areas** around the world.

- **There were 2,716 casualties of improvised mines: the highest number since the Monitor was first published in 2000.** Casualties of improvised mines were reported in 18 countries, mainly Afghanistan (1,093) and Syria (887). **Two thirds of mine casualties were killed or injured by improvised mines (2,716) and explosive remnants of war (2,038).**
- Civilians are still the main casualties of mines/ERW: **87% of casualties were civilians in 2017**, of whom **47% were children. 2,452 children** were casualties of mines and explosive remnants of war in 2017.
- **Quote 1:** “Exceptionally high numbers of casualties of improvised mines have been recorded since 2015. These new uses, as well as widespread bombing, have led to increased contamination by explosive remnants of war in several countries where weapons clearance operations will need to be implemented for many years. International rules - the Ottawa Treaty, the Oslo Convention banning cluster munitions, and the Geneva Conventions - exist to protect civilians. It is the responsibility of all states to advance these rules, apply them and make sure they are enforced.”
- **Quote 2:** “Twenty years after the entry into force of the Ottawa Treaty in 1999, which significantly reduced the threat to civilians from anti-personnel mines, the challenges of mine clearance are still immense: in urban areas newly contaminated by fighting, bombing and shelling, contaminated rubble will be very difficult to clear and require us to rethink our operating methods. The presence of mines and improvised booby traps is also forcing mine clearance operators to rethink how they work. At HI, we are exploring all available technical solutions to ensure these operations are carried out successfully.”

**Quote 3:** “Recent or ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and other countries leave large urban or peri-urban areas contaminated by explosive remnants of war and mines. This new contamination poses a serious threat to the population and represents a major obstacle to reconstruction. Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people and refugees cannot return home because of the danger posed by explosive remnants of war. This contamination sometimes adds to contamination from past conflicts. We must redouble our efforts to clear these areas and raise awareness of the risks posed by explosive remnants of war.”

#### About HI

HI is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster for 30 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions, and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Since it was founded in 1982, HI has set up development programmes in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. The network of eight national associations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) works constantly to mobilise resources, jointly manage projects and to increase the impact of the organisation's principles and actions. HI is one of six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and the winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. HI takes action and campaigns in places where “living in dignity” is no easy task.

Learn more: [www.hi-canada.org](http://www.hi-canada.org)

#### Press contact

Gabriel Perriau

Communication Officer

[g.perriau@hi.org](mailto:g.perriau@hi.org)

514 908-2813 #229