

MineTech on the road in Sudan

Three MineTech Mine Detection Dog teams arrive in Juba in Sudan at the beginning of December to help complete UN contracts for humanitarian demining in Southern Sudan.

Working alongside the Swiss Foundation for Demining (FSD), MineTech personnel will be operational across the south of the country. With many roads impassable in some places, a key role for the demining teams is to clear unpaved transport routes, both to help facilitate the work of aid agencies who need to transport staff and supplies but also to support some of the 4 million refugees displaced during the civil war to return to their villages.

The deadly legacy of fifty years of bitter fighting is somewhere between 500,000 and 2 million landmines which rank Sudan as one of ten most heavily mined countries in the world, severely hampering the activities of international aid agencies. Of most concern in a country desperate for food security is the effect landmines have had on agriculture, when farmers become afraid to work land or are forced to avoid essential cattle pastures. The total number of mine/UXO casualties in Sudan remains unknown. Estimates by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women and Children's Care and the National Authority for Prosthetics and Orthotics indicate that there have been 10,000 mine/ERW casualties. As of April 2006, a total of 2,215 mine/UXO casualties had been recorded by UNMAO.

Both sides in the recent conflicts used a large quantity of landmines but few records have been kept about exactly where they were deployed.

Explains Max Dyck, Operations Director at MineTech, "The problem of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Sudan is the result of more than 20 years of internal conflict. Antivehicle mines were emplaced on roads by the Sudan People's Liberation Army to restrict movement of Government of Sudan forces and access to towns they controlled, while the Government of Sudan used antipersonnel landmines defensively to protect its garrison towns and to prohibit movement of insurgent troops."

According to the Landmine Monitor 2006 the true extent of Sudan's mine and ERW problem remains unknown as there has been no in depth countrywide survey undertaken. However by the end of April 2006, the Sudan mine action program had recorded 1,023 dangerous areas, and more than 11,000 kilometers of major supply roads were suspected to be mined.

With the exact location and number of landmines in Southern Sudan still unknown, clearance and survey efforts remain a health and safety priority. MineTech's MDD teams hope to play a key role in identifying risk areas and verifying areas of land as free of contamination.