

# Arabic mine-action guidebook launched

By Dalya Dajani

AMMAN — An international mine-action guidebook was launched here in the Arabic language on Tuesday, providing decisionmakers and civil society with a valuable new resource on the deadly weapon.

The Guide to Mine Action, a reference book for the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), provides insight on the current reality of the landmine problem and experiences in combating their threat.

Jordân, which has its own share of landmines in its soil since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, welcomed the guidebook as an additional resource to mine-action clearance and awareness efforts in country.

"The Arabic version of the

Mine Action Guide could come at no better a time for those concerned with the landmine problem in the Middle East and North Africa region," National Centre for Demining and Rehabilitation (NCDR) Director General Mohammad Breikat said at the launch.

"It provides specialised entities and communities with crucial insight into the complexities involved in landmine clearance as well as the awareness needed to reduce the threat of mines on human lives," he added.

The NCDR is currently developing a Mine Action National Strategy to pave the way for unified work among all relevant stakeholders in the field over the next four years.

The main priorities of the strategy include rehabilitation and integration of vic-

tims into society and increasing awareness among affected communities.

The handbook, which is also available in English, French, Spanish and Russian, contains a wealth of information to assist decision makers in mine action programme planning and research.

It also presents the various techniques and approaches that have been developed over recent years to combat landmines.

The book's 12 chapters cover topics including the history of landmines, types of mines, conventions supporting the ban on their use, demining, coordination and information management of mine-action efforts, capacity building, mine risk education and victim assistance.

GICHD Director Ambassador Stephan Nellen, who

is on a three-day working visit to the country, said mine-action formed the core support mechanism for helping governments and communities address the impact of mines.

He said landmines remain a key barrier to post-conflict reconstruction, rehabilitation and the consolidation of peace.

"Each year, thousands of people fall victim to landmines. Those who survive often face great challenges in reintegrating into their societies and in receiving medical care and rehabilitation," Nellen said.

"Landmine contaminated areas cannot be used for farming, hunting, collecting firewood or many other daily activities. I have seen yesterday an example in the Jordan Valley," he added.

Ridding the Kingdom of

its remaining landmines is a pressing national concern for Jordan as unexploded ordnance continues to pose a threat to the lives of surrounding communities.

Jordan, a signatory to the Ottawa Treaty, embarked on its mine clearance efforts as early as 1993 to remove mines planted in its soil along the Syrian border, in Aqaba in the Araba Valley and in Al Baqura in the Jordan Valley.

The Jordanian Royal Corps of Engineers (JRCE), responsible for clearing landmines, have so far eliminated 98,716 out of an estimated 300,00 landmines planted jointly by the Jordan Armed Force and the Israeli army.

All minefields are fenced with metal pillars and barbed wire and marked with warning signs, which

are updated by engineering battalions on a regular basis.

Many farmers in the Jordan Valley, where a substantial number of landmines are still buried, have often borne the brunt of this problem as their fertile plots of land are fenced off pending safety clearance by deminers.

The JRCE has successfully cleared some 60 per cent of fertile land, now deemed safe for cultivation.

The prevalence of landmines in this context has been cited as one of the barriers to sustainable social and economic development in the Kingdom.

The NCDR has led the main drive for mine-action in the country and has been responsible for securing annual funding and support for demining operations and rehabilitation

projects in the country.

It forged a partnership with the JRCE in 2003 to ensure the exchange of information concerning the Mine Action Programme.

According to Breikat, the NCDR plans to conduct a national awareness campaign to reinforce precautionary behaviour among communities.

He said the campaign would be undertaken with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education as well as national and international Red Cross and Red Crescent organisations and other relevant governmental and civil society entities.

Nellen, who recently took a tour of the Kingdom's mine-affected areas, said Jordan demonstrated "great leadership" in trying to alleviate the impact of mines on communities and hoped it

would make use of the guidebook.

The Kingdom is currently pursuing a three-phase plan to complete its mine clearance mission in the country by May 2009 — the deadline mandated by the Ottawa treaty.

The first phase, which covers the Jordan Valley and the Eastern Heights is scheduled to be completed in 2005, while the second phase, which covers the security zone on the Jordan-Syrian border, is to be completed in 2007.

The third phase, to be completed in 2009, will cover the remaining areas.

The GICHD, an independent foundation supported by 18 governments, supports humanitarian mine action efforts through operational assistance and research around the world.

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