



# ICSP SUPPORTING LOCAL MINE CLEARANCE IN LIBYA



*Explosive remnants of war being destroyed in Libya. Land throughout the country has been contaminated with thousands of tonnes of munitions since 2011. Image credit: UN Development Programme.*

Libya has seen political turmoil, violence, and instability since 2011. What was hoped to be a success story – of democratic transition after the Arab revolutions – has turned into a protracted armed conflict. The country has seen competition between rival governments, a security vacuum exploited by militias and criminal groups, and the rise of terrorist organisations such as ISIS and Ansar Al Sharia. Libya's porous borders see the trafficking of arms, migrants and refugees, and in total the ongoing conflict has affected 2.8 million Libyans, including displacing 400,000 people. The country's stability is therefore a strategic goal for the European Union, which is supporting a number of actions aimed at addressing both the root causes and symptoms of the crisis.

One of the worst manifestations of the crisis is the presence of unexploded ordnance. The conflict in Libya has resulted in significant contamination of land with landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). This has led to death, injury and destruction, and made land unsafe for agriculture and other uses. Looking to the future, the EU has supported Libyan efforts to create a secure environment for the reconstruction of the country. In this context, the European Union – through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) – has been supporting, to the sum of more than €2 million, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to remove unexploded ordnance across Libya. The programme notably supports the work of a Libyan NGO, the Free

*Libya has seen rival armed groups and governments competing for political power. Image credit: vittoare.*



## Key outcomes



### Libyan land made safe

*Civilians are safer after mine clearance work in Tripoli, Sebha and other key areas.*



### Local capacity strengthened

*Start-up Libyan mine action group 3F has been registered with the Libyan Government Mine Action Centre. Trusted relationships are being built with the police, army and national authorities.*

Fields Foundation (3F), to carry out risk education, mine survey and mine clearance activities, in order to make Libya safer for all.

## The start of a journey

Rabih Jawashi is head of the 3F team. An ambitious young engineer with a career in the oil sector, in 2011 he joined hands with friends with experience in ERW, gained from working in security firms prior to the revolution.

In the months that followed the uprising, he wanted to help his fellow citizens. So the group of friends bought a truck to remove the explosives and destroy them. It was a humble start, and Jawashi soon realised the need for a professionally-trained Libyan demining body. The connection with 3F's Danish partners came soon after, in 2012.

With the help of funding from the IcSP, 3F has since created a safer environment for the civilian population in two key cities – Tripoli, on the coast, and Sebha, the biggest city in southern Libya – as well as other areas around the country. It runs mine action and risk awareness activities, and its own staff also participated in armed violence reduction workshops. DRC supported 12 training sessions and workshops for 3F in 2015 and 2016, while the two together also hosted public events and awareness sessions.

## Early achievements

When it began, 3F was a group of five to seven volunteers. Now, it is a team of 47 people. Even at the very beginning, 3F developed its own risk education tools, including brochures and radio adverts, with the support of DRC. Jawashi explains that the education material had to be adapted to the Libyan context and social traditions. For instance, to attract youth, 3F recruited talented young artists to produce material about the dangers of explosives, which are almost everywhere in Libya.

The work was so successful that 3F has been rated the leading mine action organisation in Libya. And in 2015, it received accreditation from the government-mandated Libyan Mine Action Center (LMAC), which was established in 2011.

In October 2015, the DRC launched 'Non-Technical Survey' training with support from a key government. Along with 3F, it has conducted surveys in Tawerggha, near Misrata, neighbouring Karrareem and Tomima, and six other areas, to establish where mines and ERW were buried. 3F is able to conduct surveys according to international standards, and between January and April 2016, DRC organised sessions with 203 participants across the country.



DRC's support to 3F has also included material provisions – ambulances, pickups and a front loader tractor – and fostering collaboration through training for Libyan actors. The work included army engineers, forensic police and the National Safety Authority, and was able to demonstrate a degree of neutrality in a fluid political and military context. This is important in a country where United Nations agencies and foreign embassies are often viewed with suspicion.

## The local context

The presence of ISIS and fundamentalist groups adds a further challenge to those trying to control the management of ammunitions and arms. While the 3F project was taking place, Sirte, in southern Libya, was liberated from ISIS fighters. Jawashi says the town is 80 per cent contaminated with explosives. His team was among the first to enter the devastated city, which he compares to Syrian ones.

“The work was so successful that 3F has been rated the lead mine action organisation in Libya”

## Complementary action

International NGO DanChurchAid has also provided support to Libyan civil society in a related IcSP project. One key outcome has been safer behaviour around ERW and small arms and light weapons. The NGO worked on an advocacy initiative for safer communities targeting universities and mosques in Misrata, Tripoli and Benghazi. Students attended 35 sessions to form a lobby for arms control. The group reached out to scout and girl guide groups, and women's organisations across the country, who in turn carried out workshops in schools. The project also ran psychological support activities for internally displaced children in Sebha, Tripoli and Ajdabia. In all, some 10,000 individuals benefited from these projects.

The smell of death, he says, was overwhelming: bodies were still buried under rubble.

At first, the victorious militias met the 3F team with suspicion. They were accused of spying, because instead of fighting they worked with the international community. Operating in Sirte, Jawashi explains, is dangerous in every possible respect. Some armed men refuse to give up the explosives, in order to reuse them, while others smoke while monitoring the demining, putting everyone at risk.

## Success in a difficult climate

The DRC considers 3F's work to have been exemplary – and this despite the fact that much of its training had to be conducted remotely, after the evacuation of many international humanitarian missions from Libya to Tunisia in July 2014. Rabih is equally positive about the collaboration. He says that working with DRC was a “full partnership, based on trust and respect.” He is proud of the work: in fact, he describes the small organisation he helped establish as the “greatest success” in his life.

“Jawashi says the organisation he helped establish is the greatest success in his life”

Evaluators of the IcSP project also assessed the work as having accomplished major achievements, although the context continues to pose serious problems – for example, with the disarmament and social integration of former revolutionary brigades and militia units. And practical challenges were faced on a daily basis. For instance, ammunition storage areas in Sebha had previously been bombed in NATO raids. This means that hazardous items are scattered around some residential areas. The conflict itself is of course a huge issue: after fierce fighting in 2014, more than seven million square metres in the Sebha area were in need of clearance. These and other problems means the work of demining Libya will take years and maybe decades: the scale of contamination remains unknown.

But despite the obstacles, Jawashi remains optimistic that 3F and its staff have set an example for emerging Libyan civil society organisations. They form a coherent team from around the country, defying political interference and threats from armed groups. They have an office in Misrata, and are working actively in Benghazi and the south. It is quite the achievement, and Jawashi is clear about his vision for the future: he says the goal is “Making Libyan fields free. Hence our name.”

“We have acquired the training and experience. Many Arab countries are going to face the need for demining, on a horrifying scale. Libya comes first. However, maybe we can also help later in Syria and Iraq.” It may well happen.

### Project information

Location	Libya
Project name	Community Safety and Humanitarian Mine Action in Libya
Implementing partner	Danish Refugee Council / the Free Fields Foundation
Project duration	01/02/2015 - 31/07/2016
Type of project	Humanitarian mine action; small arms and light weapons
EU funding	€2,088,611

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