



**For immediate release
23 February 2021**

Yemen: Ma'arib escalation of violence raises spectre of new landmine emergency

23 February 2021 - Houthi renewed attacks in Yemen's Ma'arib province are raising the spectre of a new landmine emergency in the area, Project Masam has warned.

Since the conflict erupted in 2014, violence and the threat of landmines have disrupted the lives of 4 million Yemeni civilians.

Since mid-2018, humanitarian mine action programme Project Masam has contributed to national security and regional stability by addressing the direct threats of explosive remnants of war to civilian lives in Yemen. Project Masam's headquarters are located in Maa'rib and its secondary headquarters are in Aden. Operational teams are deployed throughout Yemen, including in Aden, Al-Jawf, Aldala'a, Al-Hudaydah, Maa'rib, Shabwa and Ta'az.

The recent escalation of violence in Ma'arib province, in which around 1 million Yemenis sought refuge from Houthi offensives since the start of the war, is raising the prospect of a new landmine emergency.

"What is happening in Ma'arib is similar to what happened during the Al Jawf Offensive that began a year ago, in February 2020. After the frontline moved and Houthis retreated, our demining teams working in Al Jawf would go in and start clearing land. However, every time there was a new offensive, landmines were planted in the same, cleared areas after the Houthis took over control. Our teams had to return and clear the area three times to ensure all explosive devices were located and disposed of.

"We fear the Ma'arib offensive is the new Al Jawf. We cannot let civilians bear the brunt of the landmine violence," Managing Director, Ousama Algozaibi, said. "New landmines and other explosive devices planted in urban settings is a recipe for disaster. Thousands will be displaced in the next few days and weeks. Entire families will flee the violence and the landmines, sparking fears of a new humanitarian crisis in the province."

In the week 13 February to 19 February, Project Masam located and destroyed 70 banned anti-personal mines and 480 unexploded ordnances in the Ma'arib province.

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**Ousama Algozaibi, Managing Director of Project Masam is available for comment.
Videos and photos available.**



Note to editors

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About Project Masam:

To enhance the security measures in the region and ensure Yemen can rebuild and find stability, the Project for Landmine Clearance Masam was launched in December 2017, in agreement with the Yemeni government.

Training and operations commenced months later, with the first team entering Yemen in February 2018. Project Masam currently has 32 teams working in liberated areas across the country and conducts humanitarian clearance in accordance with priorities set by the Yemeni National Authority.

Project Masam trains, equips and supervises over 450 Yemeni nationals. These include administration, logistics and security support staff, who are supported by experienced technical mentors.

The efforts have already created safe spaces to allow basic humanitarian and reconstruction activities to proceed safely and without fear.

Masam does not work on active fronts, and only operates in areas where it has access to, safely.

Since the beginning of the programme, Project Masam has successfully cleared 20,299,500sqm of land, locating and destroying:

- 2,936 anti-personal mines
- 62,272 anti-tank mines
- 147,857 unexploded ordnances
- 5,859 improvised explosive devices (as at 19 February 2021)

Project Masam's work is conducted under the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief), as part of KSRelief's efforts to support landmine victims.

The organisation funds centres that cater for the treatment of injured Yemenis. These centres provide free services to amputees, provide prosthetic rehabilitation support and focus on the rehabilitation of former child soldiers across the country.



About landmine violence

Landmines have plagued Yemen since the 1960s. More recently, Houthi forces' widespread use of landmines across Yemen since 2015 has killed and injured thousands of civilians and prevented aid organisations from reaching vulnerable communities.

During the course of the current war, the Houthis have planted landmines disguised as rocks, pens and children's toys in villages, farmlands, schools, roads and parks. With an estimated 1 million-plus landmines dispersed and counting, Yemen is the most mined nation since World War II. There is no official mapping of the mines' location, as mines have been laid by hand often with no discernible pattern or record.

Whilst comprehensive landmine casualty figures are being collected across different governorates, this data is not centralised and thus the exact number of casualties cannot be verified across the country. It is apparent, however, that mines have caused more casualties than the fighting, with landmine victims being mainly children and women.

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