

Mine-detecting dogs at work (Germany/Yemen)

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A number of countries are assisting in demining Yemen, like the US, Japan, Saudi Arabia and others.

Germany committed to continue support

Germany is doing a good job to support Yemen in this regard despite the fact that it is one of the most important donors to Yemen. There are two ways in which Germany is helping Yemen in this area. One way is through the UNDP along with other countries. Germany has supported the Program through UNDP between 2000 and 2003 with roughly 450.000 US Dollars. "Our support in 2003 alone - both bi- and multilateral - amounts to 1.069.501,61 Euro," Mr. Mann said. The other is that it is supporting the Mine Dog Detection Center (MDDC). Dogs are being brought to the country to be trained to detect mines. In 2000 Germany was requested to help Yemen Mine Action Program (MAP) Implementation of a Mine Dog Component. "The program started the first trial in Aden by the end of 2001", said Mr. Dieter Windeler, Program Manager GTZ.

In March 2002 the first training started. In Aden dogs were having a problem. Four dogs died because of hot climate and humidity. Therefore, the training center was moved to Sana'a as dogs are very expensive; each one costs around \$ 7000. Buildings for the center in Sana'a were built with 50% of the cost paid by the government of Germany. Of course, the first contribution made by Germany was in 1999-2000 in the survey project. It also, said al-Azi, supports the MAP with advisors who have been working in Yemen for four years now. In fact, it does not support the training phase of the program; rather it agreed to support the operational phase. The budget specified for the MDDC last year amounted to around \$ 1 million. The German ambassador said that his country is committed to continue supporting the program. "There is a commitment that Germany will carry on with its contribution and we have learnt whatever necessary and possible, there can be an extension and a possible further commitment to provide assistance," he said.

It was an interesting job I saw last week. I moved with the German ambassador, Mr. Windeler, MAP manager, Mansur al-Azi as well as Mr. Walid al-Saqqaf, editor of Yemen Times to the training center at Sheraton area. Yemen people are being trained in the center by Afghan experts brought by the German embassy in Kabul. They are doing a wonderful job, training Yemenis on how to use dogs for detection of land mines. You can find here the place where dogs are kept and taken care of. I have seen only two dogs kept in their cages. Why two only I asked and the reply was that they are sick and therefore they did not go for training in the camp at Dhola'a. We moved to the camp where you will find everybody with his dog, training it in different ways on how to detect mines. There are twenty- four dogs in the camp carrying out the exercises as 12 are already in the field on a detection mission in Ka'ataba, Sad'a and south of Sana'a.

It is interesting to see how dogs are trained. They go through intensive exercises. They can go to the field only once they are tested and licensed. "The practice we have seen today here seems to me very promising and highly contributes to solve the problems in Yemen in the field of demining," Mr. Mann remarked.

Why Dogs?

Some people might ask why dogs. Dogs are intelligent and reliable for mine detection, according to Mr. Windeler, as they have good noses and can sniff explosives very easily. "We use dogs to make quality insurance, making sure that the fields are completely free from mines. We give an approval for that after dogs detect the fields," said Mansur al-Azi.

Dogs are in particular useful in Yemen due to the fact that it is highly mineralized and that using various sorts of metal apparatuses for mine detection might not be effective. Moreover, dogs speed up the work as one dog can do in one day what a man can do in 20 days with more efficiency and accuracy. The idea of using dogs was a big challenge in the beginning, according to al-Azi as from a cultural point of view people in Yemen do not welcome dogs and some started talking even on how much money is spent on dogs. Even people were not accepting the idea of working with dogs. But, they are now very much motivated to join the task.

The German program aims to empower Yemeni personnel to carry out the task and manage the MDDC themselves. Courses are scheduled to be complete by the end of this year with more improvement of infrastructure in MDDC, training area and equipment. The Germans are planning to fence an area at Dhola'a camp to be planted with mines and explosives so that training of dogs on detection would be more fruitful. It is planned that in 2-3 years Yemen will hopefully be able to manage the center. It will have well-educated and experienced instructors and experts to run the project. The center will be handed over to Yemen when is sure that it can have a hold on ground.

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