DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL

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Humanitarian Mine Action in Sudan

OVERVIEW

Sudan is now in its fourth year of intensive armed conflict, with explosive weapons continuing to be used by warring parties across the country. This adds to a legacy of contamination built over decades of violence, leaving communities exposed to risks long after the fighting has moved on. New types of ordnance are also entering the battlefield, particularly those delivered by drones. Humanitarian mine action activities remain a critical, yet critically underfunded, precondition for safe returns and for widescale recovery of the Sudanese economy.

Since 2004, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has supported communities affected by conflict and displacement across Sudan. DRC's humanitarian mine action activities began with Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) in 2022. Land clearance operations began in response to the conflict in 2024 and have since scaled up rapidly: from 210,000 m^2 surveyed and cleared in 2024, to 2.4 million m^2 in 2025 and 6.3 million m^2 so far in 2026. Almost all clearance work has taken place in Khartoum, one of Sudan's most heavily contaminated states, where 7.75 million m^2 has been surveyed and cleared.

Today, DRC is the longest-serving international NGO delivering humanitarian mine action in Sudan. We work alongside Sudanese NGO partners JASMAR, NUMAD and FPDO, and in coordination with Sudan's National Mine Action Center (NMAC) and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

A GROWING CRISIS

An estimated 8.6 million people remain internally displaced within Sudan, while roughly 4.9 million have returned to their areas of origin since early 2025. For many of these returning families, the journey home is just as dangerous as the flight that preceded it, as they move into neighbourhoods now contaminated by explosive hazards.

All parties to the conflict have continued to use explosive and remote weapons across the country, including in densely populated urban areas such as Omdurman. Civilian harm from this violence worsened in 2025: casualties from explosive violence rose by an estimated 21 percent compared with 2024 and civilian deaths rose by 34 percent. Moreover, when explosive weapons were used in populated areas of Sudan in 2025, 96 percent of those killed or injured were civilians. In 2026, the UN estimates that 73% of civilian deaths were caused by drone strikes.

Beyond the immediate casualties, explosive weapons also leave a lethal legacy behind: failure rates for munitions used in conflict are estimated to be up to 10 percent; with the scale of bombardment areas in Khartoum, North Kordofan and Blue Nile are under, there could be millions of hazards. Sudan's unexploded remnants are now buried in rubble, hidden in burned-out vehicles and scattered through homes, schools, markets and hospitals. A recent DRC survey found that 66% of people surveyed in Khartoum feared that there was unexploded ordnance in their communities, with agricultural land and damaged buildings perceived as particularly dangerous.

Worsening contamination

Khartoum's contamination is both unprecedented and uniquely urban, where a mix of rockets, grenades and other unexploded ordnance are spread inside buildings, along roadways, and across densely populated neighborhoods. At least 13 minefields have now been discovered and confirmed in Khartoum, including in Bahri and Al-Mogran, a strategic area at the convergence of the Nile that is critical for civilian access. Landmine-related accidents are being reported in Khartoum, including incidents that have killed and injured civilians, among them children. DRC's data indicates that over 60% of explosive ordnance victims in Sudan are children, over 80% of whom are boys. The threat is evolving as intensified drone strikes create the possibility of new, unmapped contamination in areas that had previously been cleared and considered safe.

Contamination is not confined to Khartoum. Darfur and the Kordofan states continue to suffer from legacy landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination inherited from Sudan's earlier conflicts, while the current war adds new hazards to those areas. Before this conflict began in April 2023, two decades of clearance work had reduced Sudan's confirmed hazardous areas from 170.9 to 33.9 square kilometres. The current war has reversed this progress, as fighting has continued to spread into new areas and drone strikes on populated areas intensified across the country, layering new explosive hazards faster than the sector can clear them.

Impact on food security and livelihoods

Contamination with explosive ordnance is preventing Sudan's recovery by restricting people's access to livelihoods and productive land. Fear of explosive hazards is a major obstacle to restarting agricultural activities, with returnees frequently reporting that they avoid cultivating land because they cannot be certain it is safe. Over a period of only 3 months, DRC and its local partner's emergency response EOD team has responded to 27 reports of hazards in farmland in Aj Jazirah state alone.

The impact extends beyond individual fields and disrupts irrigation canals, grazing areas, roads and access routes, milling facilities and storage infrastructure and therefore affects the wider food system. Several minefields in Khartoum and in Sennar state have been discovered when the resumption of agricultural activities following the cessation of fighting resulted in tragic accidents. Over half of survey respondents in 2026 in Khartoum state, many of htem returnees, reported fears that agricultural land was contaminated.

As larger-scale development and investment in Sudan's agricultural recovery begins to resume, uncertainty over the safety of land and infrastructure could delay investment or prevent it from reaching its full potential. Ensuring safe access to land and essential infrastructure is therefore a critical precondition for restoring livelihoods, enabling longer-term investment and strengthening food security.



Photo: Building search, DRC

DRC and partner mine action teams' results to date:

8.85M m²
Land surveyed and cleared since 2024

508,972
People reached with risk education since 2022

40,446
Items of ordnance and ammunition cleared

In Al Kadro, northern Khartoum, a minefield separates a village from the farmland and river on which its residents depend to earn income and produce food. A DRC clearance team has been working at the site for more than six months and has so far identified and removed seven anti-tank mines and 120 other items of unexploded ordnance, helping to restore safe access to land and livelihoods. As one resident explained:

> *The area is full of ammunition and landmines in the direction of the river, and every day there is an accident. There are many remnants and no one has come to remove them. Please come and clear the mines, because the area toward the river is where we farm and it is our livelihood.*

Delayed access to durable solutions

Explosive ordnance contamination is also one of the central barriers to durable solutions in Sudan. Returnees are often the first to face these risks directly: men typically return ahead of their families to assess whether an area is safe to live in, putting them in contact with unmarked contamination first, while children arriving later are especially vulnerable because they don't recognise what ordnance looks like. More than 2.7 million people have already returned to Khartoum, where the likelihood of encountering explosive ordnance is high and awareness of the risks remains extremely low. A survey of people on the move, conducted by DRC's Mixed Migration Centre in 2024 found that 68 percent reported a risk of explosive hazards along their journey, rising to 75 percent among those travelling with children.

Sector capacity constraints

The sector working to address this contamination remains severely under-resourced. DRC is currently the longest serving international NGO conducting humanitarian mine action in Sudan, working alongside a small number of national NGOs, international NGOs, and Sudan's National Mine Action Center (NMAC), which oversees the sector. Across the sector, there are not enough trained EOD Level 3 operators to meet demand. This is the qualification level required to lead teams and manage complex urban contamination. Specialised equipment required for these activities remains scarce, and challenging to import. Mine action access is also largely confined to areas under government control and contamination in areas outside government control is known to exist but remains largely unassessed and unmapped.

Funding for the sector has also tended to arrive as short-term emergency support rather than the sustained, multi-year investment this capacity gap requires. In the meantime, an estimated 14 million people across Sudan need mine action assistance in 2026. Sudan is a State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and has submitted an extension request to achieve clearance by 31 March 2029, a target that will require significantly greater sector-wide capacity than currently exists.

DRC'S RESPONSE

Within this constrained sector, DRC's own humanitarian mine action operations have grown steadily since 2022. Teams began with EORE, focusing first on helping people understand and avoid the risks, before expanding into land clearance in 2024, with a strong focus on capacity development as a strategic objective in 2026 and beyond.

Risk education

DRC delivers Explosive Ordnance Risk Education alongside local partners JASMAR and FPDO, reaching communities through radio and social media, community focal points and direct sessions. Since 2022, DRC and its partners have delivered more than 14,185 sessions, reaching 508,972 people in 12 states, including host communities, internally displaced people, returnees and people with disabilities.

Messaging is also carried through television broadcasts and animated videos posted on social media channels, extending its reach to diverse audiences, including youth and children. To reach returnees in transit, teams have also boarded buses carrying people returning from Egypt, delivering safety sessions at stations along the route before the buses continued their journey. DRC has worked with the Sudanese Deaf Union to develop specialised messaging for those who are unable to hear risk education sessions, and has stuck risk education posters to the backs of rickshaws in Khartoum to extend the reach of messaging throughout the city.

DRC's risk education is being integrated into livelihoods programmes to help people participate safely in economic recovery activities. For example, through an economic recovery project, local partner FPDO provides risk education to youth workers before they begin infrastructure rehabilitation cash-for-work activities. Participants learn how to recognise potential unexploded ordnance and what to do if they encounter it.



Photo: Risk education in a school in Khartoum, DRC

Land clearance

Since November 2024, DRC and local partners JASMAR and NUMAD have conducted continuous land clearance operations in Khartoum State, one of the most heavily contaminated states in the country. Operations expanded to Aj Jazirah State in 2025, followed by White Nile and Sennar in 2026. To date, DRC and its partners have surveyed and cleared 8.85 million m^2 of land across Sudan, including critical infrastructure such as hospitals and schools. The ordnance and ammunition cleared so far includes 49 landmines, 6,663 items of unexploded ordnance and 33,734 rounds of small arms ammunition. Land clearance is a key enabler of humanitarian access and a critical precondition for durable solutions. Without it, people cannot safely return home, children cannot return to school, and basic services cannot resume.

Building up the HMA sector

In response to the scale of the needs for mine action, in 2026 DRC conducted the first Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Level 3 training delivered in Sudan since the war began. Developed in partnership with NMAC and delivered at the NMAC Training Centre in Omdurman, the course qualified 30 additional personnel from NMAC and local partners JASMAR, NUMAD and FPDO, more than doubling the country's pool of EOD Level 3 personnel.

> “The EOD Level 3 course enabled Sudan's first female operator to qualify at this level. Growing up in South Kordofan, Wafaa saw firsthand the dangers that unexploded ordnance can pose to children. One day, she witnessed an accident involving children who were collecting scrap metal. Among the items they had gathered was a grenade, along with other unexploded ordnance. One boy put the items in his pocket. Moments later, an explosion occurred. The boy was seriously injured and lost one of his hands. The incident stayed with Wafaa. It showed her how the remnants of conflict could continue to threaten children long after the fighting had ended. It also became a turning point in her life, contributing directly to her decision to enter humanitarian mine action. *“I do HMA for the next generation*,” she says.”



Photo: manual mine clearance in Khartoum, DRC and JASMAR

Land clearance is a precondition for humanitarian access, economic recovery, safe returns and durable solutions. Without it, people cannot safely return home, restore their livelihoods and food security, children cannot go back to school and basic services cannot resume.

DRC's vision is a Sudan where civilians can rebuild their lives and livelihoods free from explosive threats and we urge the international community to maintain and expand its support for this life-saving work

"Motasim has worked in mine action since 2006. He earned his EOD Level 1 qualification that year and progressed to EOD Level 2 in 2015. Since then, he has been waiting for an opportunity to undertake EOD Level 3. "*We need to adapt*," he says, pointing to the growing presence of UXO in a conflict that has become increasingly urban. His ambition after so many years remains simple: "*I hope one day my country will be free of mines and knows peace. I will then be happy.*"

"Nour works with a Sudanese humanitarian mine action organisation. She recalls seeing large numbers of serious injuries associated with unexploded ordnance.
Through DRC's Trauma Medic Training, Nour has strengthened her ability to recognize different types of injuries, react quickly and identify an appropriate immediate response.
Nour believes that her community needs help and that with the knowledge she now has, she will be able to help more effectively.
"*Past trauma for me is not a barrier, it is a motivation,*" she says. *"I don't want other people to go through what I've been through."*

DRC's capacity building approach - conducted entirely for staff from national organizations and the NMAC - extends beyond EOD Level 3 training. DRC also delivers EOD Level 1/2 and quality management training. As the first international mine action NGO to begin work in Sudan since the conflict, DRC recognized the need for a new approach to address urban contamination, and created the first building search and clearance SOPs and training program, now integrated in national standards. Through community-based EORE, DRC trains community volunteers, including teachers and religious leaders, so they can provide information to people in their own communities about the risks posed by unexploded ordnance and other explosive hazards. Beyond HMA technical training, DRC provides project cycle management support to strengthen partners' capacity to design, manage and deliver humanitarian projects.

DRC is also helping to strengthen the systems and facilities that support the humanitarian mine action sector in Sudan as a whole. This includes providing equipment and training to support NMAC's explosive ordnance reporting hotline, strengthening its ability to receive and manage community-reported hazard information and link these reports to appropriate emergency response via survey and clearance teams.

In North Kordofan and Khartoum, DRC has installed billboards in crowded public areas including markets and near the airport to raise awareness of explosive ordnance threats and how to report them, directing communities toward this same hotline. DRC has also rehabilitated NMAC's national training centre in Omdurman, which is used by HMA organisations across Sudan. Together, these efforts contribute not only to individual organisations' capacity, but to strengthening the systems, institutions and infrastructure that allow the wider HMA sector to function.



Photo: risk education to target boys on the move, DRC

SCALING UP THE RESPONSE

Donor governments and Member States can build on this experience by taking the following steps:

- **Donor governments should increase both direct and pooled funding to Sudan's mine action sector.** This funding needs to be sustained and multi-year, not tied to a single mechanism or a single actor. Mine action funding must be fully integrated within investments for large-scale recovery, particularly agricultural and urban development projects - not an optional add-on. **Dedicated funding should also strengthen the overall capacity of the national mine action sector**, including through advanced technical training such as EOD Level 3, institutional support to NMAC and shared infrastructure, such as training centres, equipment, information systems.
- Sudan has not endorsed the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWIPA). **States that have endorsed the Declaration should continue to invoke EWIPA principles in their diplomatic engagement with/on Sudan**, specifically through bilateral channels, UN Security Council statements and other forums.
- **Donor governments and Member States should support Sudan in meeting its Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention obligations.** Sudan is itself a State Party to the Convention and is obligated to clear all anti-personnel mines under its jurisdiction by 1 April 2027, while its extension request remains under consideration. Other States Parties to the Convention have a treaty-based responsibility to provide international cooperation and assistance to help fellow States Parties meet obligations like this one.

DRC'S PRIORITIES

- **Expanding clearance and risk education activities** into currently under-served or newly accessible areas such as North Kordofan
- **Continuing to prioritise training for women operators**, who remain underrepresented in the sector
- **Institutional strengthening of Sudan's HMA infrastructure** such as NMAC's explosive ordnance reporting hotline and coordination systems
- **Partnering with new local organisations** to expand the number of Sudanese NGOs able to deliver the full spectrum of HMA activities to meet the scale of the challenge ahead
- **Integrating clearance and risk education with livelihoods and protection support** in agricultural areas and markets
- **Strengthening data collection** to support task prioritization and evidence the scale of contamination.
- **Operationalizing a comprehensive victim assistance approach** that leverages DRC's protection and economic recovery expertise

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