

## JORDAN: First all-female demining team in Middle East



Photo: ICRC

Over 340 different mines are currently being found by demining groups all over the world

AMMAN, 1 December 2008 (IRIN) - An all-female team of 24 deminers, the first of its kind in the Middle East, started its official duties on 30 November, working alongside dozens of men who have been combing a mine-infested area on the Syrian border.

The group graduated on 25 November after intensive training in the border town of Jaber conducted by specialists from the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), which is funding demining in northern Jordan.

"It is a challenge that I take with pride," said Fida, one of the graduates.

"Fida could have worked in any office job thanks to her university degree, but she chose to be a member of the first demining team to help residents of this town," said NPA spokeswoman Lina Gazi. "We want to show everybody that women can do anything men can do."

In a statement on 25 November, NPA said 38 women aged 20-36 from villages in the northern area of Mafraq began training in October 2008. Of these, 24 completed the full course and have formed the first female demining team in the Middle East.

"Gender equality and women's empowerment are some of the pillars of NPA's work. We have formed female demining teams in many countries, including Sudan, Angola and Croatia," said Stephen Bryant, NPA programme manager in Jordan. Demining statistics showed that while female deminers may be slower than their male counterparts, their work is more thorough, he said.

The 24 women will join the ranks of NPA deminers working in the Northern Border Mine Clearance Project, clearing the last minefields in Jordan, which date from the 1967 war with Israel and political tension with neighbouring Syria in the 1970s.

The demining project will remove the landmine threat hanging over 50,000 civilians, enable completion of the Wihda Dam on the Jordanian-Syrian border, and allow construction of a free trade zone between Jordan and Syria.

Technicians said army maps did not show the exact location of mines, many of which had shifted position due to weather conditions.

The US\$10 million mine clearance project involves over 100 mine specialists, including members of the local community, and is supported, among others, by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan and Norway.