

Press Release

4 APRIL 2024 - INTERNATIONAL MINE AWARENESS DAY

**THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING ALLOWS A MASSIVE DEPLOYMENT
OF OUR MINE CLEARANCE TEAMS ACROSS UKRAINE**

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FSD's deminers are back in the minefields after the winter break. The teams have been significantly reinforced and deployed to new provinces to address an explosive contamination now numbering in the millions. Additional machinery and mine detection dogs will reinforce our efforts before the summer. The aim is not only to prevent new civilian casualties but also to enable communities affected by the war to recover. Repairing vital infrastructure, resuming agriculture, and the return of displaced individuals cannot progress as long as the land is littered with explosive ordnance.

In Ukraine during winter, the snow prevents the use of metal detectors, and it is impossible to safely excavate explosive devices trapped in the frozen ground. Hence, demining activities are generally suspended, usually from November to April. This winter however, the number of mines and unexploded ordnance in the country continued to increase, along with civilian casualties. Since 24 February 2022, over a thousand women, men, and children have been killed or maimed by accidental explosions.

In March 2024, milder temperatures and the melting of the snow allowed FSD teams to resume demining. "We have to work as quickly as possible during the months of the year when the weather permits, so that we can return safe land back to the population" explains Hansjörg Eberle, Director of FSD. According to estimates, tens of thousands of shells are fired every day by the conflicting parties. "With a failure rate of 10 to 30%, this easily reaches several million unexploded shells scattered across the country, which can now detonate upon simple contact; when a farmer passes or a curious child touches. And this number does not include cluster bombs and light ammunition like grenades or mortar shells, whose failure rates are equivalent or even higher, nor landmines."

Nearly 400 Employees Deployed Across Four Provinces

To tackle this colossal task, FSD has quadrupled its workforce within a year. "We now have 380 employees in the country, which will grow to 600 by June, 90% of whom are Ukrainians recruited and trained locally," details Alex van Roy, FSD's Deputy Head of Operations. Currently, three major mine action projects are being conducted in the provinces of Kharkiv and Chernihiv. Additional teams are in training and will be deployed by June in the provinces of Donetsk and Kherson. We are also expecting new specialised machinery and eight mine detection dogs, which will begin their acclimatization in two weeks."

FSD

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With a budget of 32 million for 2024 and 29 demining teams, FSD is one of the largest international humanitarian demining NGO in Ukraine.

Recruiting, training, and deploying demining teams represent a complex challenge. Regular mobilization of men by the army makes retention of male staff difficult, encouraging increasing participation by women. An intensive training, lasting four to six weeks, is then required to transform a former teacher, farmer, or bank teller into a qualified deminer. Difficulties related to equipment acquisition, such as stocks of metal detector and protective equipment, have been obstacles to overcome. Furthermore, increased stress and risks from bombardments and regular alerts add to the complexity of working in this particular context.

The Dual Role of Demining

On the occasion of International Mine Awareness Day, it's important to emphasize the dual role of humanitarian demining. Demining not only saves lives by preventing often deadly explosions but is also the prerequisite step for any activity in an area affected by conflict. "Whether it's restoring electrical installations or repairing a bombed hospital, demining must always come first, stresses Hansjörg Eberle. Without demining, it is impossible for farmers to cultivate their land without putting themselves in danger, or for people displaced by combat to return home without the risk of stepping in the wrong place."

In 2023, FSD deminers cleared over 320,000 square metres of land, including agricultural lands, village and urban areas, and vital infrastructure. During the same period, nearly 142,000 women, men, and children participated in face-to-face risk education sessions organised by FSD and learned to spot suspicious devices in their environment, as well as to adopt appropriate behaviours to avoid accidental explosions. Awareness campaigns are also conducted online via social media, to increase the reach of our risk education efforts.

In parallel, FSD carries out extensive work in marking potentially contaminated areas to help protect civilian populations until mine clearance operations are complete.

PHOTOS

- Photos of our demining operations in Ukraine:
<https://www.swisstransfer.com/d/63b8c346-8ffe-450a-80f1-743fce7b5aaa>
- Additional photo/video content on request: communications@fsd.ch

CAMPAIGN HASHTAGS

#MineAwarenessDay2024 #IMAD #IMAD2024

ABOUT FSD

Based in Geneva, Switzerland, FSD (Fondation suisse de déminage) is a humanitarian NGO specialised in mine action, and the only Swiss organisation conducting humanitarian demining operations in the field.

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For more than 25 years, FSD has been committed to protecting civilian populations from landmines and explosive remnants of war, now employing over 600 people across four continents. Our teams locate and destroy explosive devices, conduct awareness campaigns among affected populations, implement assistance projects for victims of accidental explosions, and provide advice and support to local authorities and organisations in mine action.

More information: www.fsd.ch

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