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Trust fund with Jordan politically significant, only first step - NATO

By Alia Shukri Hamzeh

BRUSSELS - NATO officials said Wednesday the alliance's trust fund with Jordan to help the country eliminate explosive remnants of war (ERW) is an important "political symbol".

They said on the sidelines of the organisation's meeting here that the gesture demonstrates a real drive on both sides for greater cooperation and an interactive relationship that can come up with concrete and practical results.

"This trust fund is politically very important because it is the first of its kind with a Mediterranean Dialogue [MD] country," NATO spokesperson James Appathurai told The Jordan Times on Wednesday.

"It also serves as an example for other Mediterranean partners to follow," Appathurai added.

He said the fund is a tool that will help foster development in the area of identifying and destroying explosive devices and can lead the way for developing other activities.

NATO launched the trust fund with Jordan on Monday in Brussels to assist the Kingdom deal with landmines and ERWs. This is the first fund with one of the seven nations in the alliance's MD outreach programme with the Middle East and North Africa.

According to NATO officials, the trust fund will finance a survey and the delivering of search equipment to the Jordan Armed Forces (JAF) to help them find and destroy unexploded ordnances and other ERWs. The cost of the project is estimated at more than \$4.9 million over a span of two years.

They said meetings on the working levels between Jordanian and NATO experts have already started and that the trust fund project became active from the moment of the signing.

Appathurai said NATO has a vast experience in the field of mine detection and destruction across Europe, adding that the alliance will soon complete the last destruction of mine stockpiles in the Balkans.

A NATO official told journalists from MD and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries participating in a press tour that discussions were under way with two other MD countries (Egypt and Mauritania) to set up a similar trust fund.

"The location and destruction of unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war will increase the safety and security of affected communities, improving land use in the affected areas," said a NATO press release.

It will also improve the capability of JAF to identify and destroy old, unserviceable and obsolete ammunition stockpiles, which will increase the safety and security aspects of local workers, servicemen as well as population living close to ammunition depots.

The fund launching ceremony held on Monday at NATO headquarters in Brussels included representatives of Norway, Spain and Switzerland, who signed two agreements with the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency, along with NATO top officials and Jordan's Ambassador to Brussels Ahmad Masaadeh, among other officials.

During the signing ceremony, Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero said the project should help build confidence between "us and demonstrate to the Jordanian public the merits of working together with the alliance in the context of our Mediterranean Dialogue".

Jordan's partnership deal with NATO entered into force in 1995. It took part in numerous NATO activities and recently offered to host an alliance-supported regional security cooperation centre dedicated to training and educating officers from countries of the Middle East.

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