

**National Mine Action Authority Bill Proposal, 2010**  
**(by group of MKs) P. 2399**  
**Preliminary Reading**  
**Knesset Plenum, July 14, 2010**

**Tzachi Hangbi (Chairman of Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee):**

The proposal before us, as many bill proposals that come before the Knesset, deals with a very - very important issue. In fact, any bill presented to this house, has an interest to promote an important national issue. There is legislation on security, on economy, on agriculture, on tourism, on health, etc.

The bill we are discussing today is unique in that it deals with all these issues combined. And in fact, if this bill wins the support of this house, every one of these important fields of activity will see significant progress. Above all, the proposal to establish a civilian national mine action authority will save lives.

I must confess, Madam Speaker, that not many months ago, in fact until the last winter, I had no real idea about the scope of the landmine problem. I suppose there are people here that spent many years in close proximity to minefields, as Minister Peled and Deputy Minister Vilnai. I had known that there was some problem of landmines, and had seen from time to time while hiking fences with the sign "Stop, Landmines Ahead!", but until last winter – until the tragic and moving incident of the boy Daniel Yuval, who went hiking with his family and many other Israelis on Mount Avital, happy with the snowman they built on one of the days of snow, and lost his leg as a result of stepping on a landmine – the aggravating extent of this problem. I did not know that in fact one whole percent of the land of Israel, almost 200,000 dunams (50,000 acres), is contaminated by landmines: in the Galilee and the Arava and the Golan and the Jordan Valley and around Jerusalem. Hundreds of thousands, some say up to a million landmines scattered along the borders for decades, and a large number, perhaps the bulk of them, is no longer necessary for national security and is not part of the strategy of defending our borders. Some of these are not borders of war but borders of peace, such as the Arava and the Jordan Valley, but the mines are still there.

Another thing I had not known before, that for years great efforts have been made to try and deal with this problem, but all these efforts have failed. Years ago, the State Comptroller sharply criticized the fact that no overall, national, systematic steps to solve the problem are taken. Israeli governments have discussed these issues and have made decisions. The IDF has taken upon itself to deal with the problem, to allocate resources and clear landmines from time to time. In practice, the problem has not disappeared, neither did it become smaller, but it has actually spread, due to rains, floods and erosion that tend to take mines out of partially fenced sites, and move them to areas near towns and villages and close to hiking trails, and occasionally tragic incidents take place, are echoed for a short period of time in the media, but then disappear and nothing is changed.

And another thing I did not know – and this stands at the base of my motivation and the motivation of 72 other Knesset Members who signed the bill, and the government's support today and the support of the Deputy Minister of Defense – I did not know that there is no need to reinvent the wheel in dealing with the landmine problem. Dozens of countries in recent decades, in fact since the Second World War, took upon themselves, after experiencing similar tragedies, to clear minefields with creative means, using a methodology that has proved itself time after time after time. Many international organizations

around the world are leading these efforts. Most countries of the world, I think about 160 countries have signed the Mine Ban Treaty and operate within its framework to promote a struggle against landmines, and we are still lagging behind.

Then Daniel Yuval, while still carried by his father, bleeding and in pain, said that all he worried about was that no one else – his sister that was there and the other kids that were there – gets hurt. And then then in the hospital bed, 24 hours after the incident, a child – it was so moving and amazing to watch him – a child that was hurt so badly saying to the media that had come to see how he was doing, that all you have to do is to make sure that it does not happen to anyone else ever again. It has already happened to me, he said, now we have to make sure it does not happen again. This, I am sure, touched everyone in this house and certainly outside of this house.

We stood up and came together, opposition and coalition, Jews and Arabs, old and young Members of Knesset – in fact, you can say that almost all MKs, except for ministers and deputy ministers that can not sign on private bills, 73 out of 80 MKs, I guess the others just were not here at the time of signing – we all decided to take action.

This proposed Mine Action Authority should, according to international standards, formulate a national plan that will be accepted by all government ministries, and in cooperation with the IDF will determine which minefields should be left, and then they will be fenced in a more effective way to prevent injuries, if possible, and the others will be removed within seven to ten years from the land of Israel. The government, once such an Authority is in place, will be obligated to provide the necessary resources that will be required over the years in order to implement this plan. Of course, the plan has to be approved by the government.

International experience shows that once a country assumes responsibility over mine action, international NGOs and the UN itself offer significant funding to help these projects succeed. There are international organizations that know how to do this very well. There are individuals such as Jerry White, who is a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize together with his organization "Survivor Corps", and Heidi Kuhn, who heads the organization "Roots of Peace", and many others who came to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, joined forces with the members who signed the bill, and are helping us with their rich experience, and I'm sure many others will be by our side throughout this endeavor.

I want to congratulate the government that was able to overcome the natural disagreements that sometimes exist between different ministries, and to support the bill, given our commitment to promote the bill in coordination with the government and not in defiance to it, as we will of course do. I want to thank the Members of the Knesset, the ones who are present and those who are not, who share this revolutionary, historic and essential move, that we are proud of and hope to complete as soon as possible. Thank you, Madam.

**Matan Vilnai (Deputy Minister of Defense):**

Honorable Speaker, my fellow Members of Knesset, all the words said by MK Tzachi Hanegbi are correct. Landmines are polluting the land of the country. We are exposed to it only when there is an incident, as Tzachi mentioned, as happened several months ago. Unfortunately, such cases have happened more than once and this proposal seems correct. I'm happy about this initiative. We agreed that the legislation process will be coordinated with the government, and I hope that in the course of

several years, because we are dealing with millions of landmines – some of them are Israeli mines and some are enemy mines – we will have landmines only within designated battle fields and nowhere else.

**Ruhama Avraham – Balila (Deputy Speaker of the Knesset):**

I thank you, Deputy Minister. Because there is a consensus between the presenter of the bill proposal, MK Tzachi Hanegbi, and the government, we will proceed to vote, please.

**Vote No. 19**

In favor of the bill to the committee earlier discussion - 22

Against - None

Abstainers – None

The proposal to move the bill on the National Mine Action Authority, 2010, by MK Tzachi Hanegbi and a group of MKs, to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee be prepared for first reading is hereby approved.