

PRESS RELEASE

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Fatal explosion during a demining training session in Albania: Two Handicap International deminers have been detained by the Albanian police

Graham Rees, a 45 year old British man and Emin Durakovic a 40 year old Bosnian are currently being questioned by the Kukes police in north-east Albania in relation to the fatal accident that occurred during a demining training session on Monday morning.

A sub-munition, supposedly defused, exploded causing the deaths of two Albanian deminers during a theory training session led by specialists from Handicap International. Ten other people were injured, five seriously.

The training session was organised by Handicap International as part of a project financed by the European Union through the UNDP (United Nations Development Program).

It is too soon to be certain of the exact circumstances surrounding the accident. In addition to the police inquiry, the facts will be established by a technical investigation, as is customary in these cases, which will be led jointly by the Albanian Mine Action Executive, the UNDP and Handicap International.

Graham Rees gained extensive experience during his time in the military and was awarded an MBE for his training skills. Project Manager for Handicap International Albania, he was in Kosovo at the time of the accident, which took place during the fourth week of a theoretical training course. Graham returned to Kukes immediately to express his sympathy to the victims of this incomprehensible tragedy and to their relatives as well as to lend his support to his team. Of his own accord, Graham placed himself at the disposition of the Kukes police.

Following an initial interview, Graham Rees and Emin Durakovic were released, however later on Monday evening they were recalled by the local police for further questioning. They were kept in police custody until today and no information was disclosed as to any possible charges that may be brought against them.

The theoretical part of this type of training is systematically performed with defused sub-munitions provided by authorised third parties who assume responsibility for the inoffensive nature of these objects. Handicap International has no knowledge as to how an active sub-munition could have found itself amongst those entrusted to its team.

Handicap International maintains its absolute confidence in the professionalism and judgement of both Graham Rees and Emin Durakovic. The significant experience of these two men rules out any possibility of safety having been taken too lightly.

Handicap International remains in permanent contact with its team in Albania who are cooperating fully with the Albanian authorities and the UN representatives with regards to this investigation. Handicap International has commissioned a local lawyer and expresses its confidence in the procedures put in place by the Albanian justice in order to establish the facts that led to this tragic accident.

This is Handicap International's first lethal accident in 10 years of humanitarian demining activities.

Notes for editors

Handicap International is an international NGO working in 55 countries worldwide. Its mission is to provide support to disabled people and landmine/UXOs victims. The organisation is co-founder of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

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