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UN Agency Partners with Freelancer to Tackle Global Crisis

Platform that delivered 20,000+ solutions to NASA now helping deal with deadly underwater threats

SAN FRANCISCO, California – December 22, 2025 – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has partnered with [Freelancer](#) – the world’s largest freelancing and crowdsourcing platform – harnessing Freelancer’s incredible global reach in an effort to eliminate a deadly hidden danger.

The UNDP has **launched an open innovation challenge on Freelancer** to find affordable, community-accessible solutions for detecting and marking underwater explosive ordnance that threatens lives and livelihoods in conflict and post-conflict zones worldwide.

The challenge seeks proposals for devices costing less than \$5,000 that can detect explosives from at least 5 meters to depths of 30 meters and allow users to mark locations on handheld GPS systems or mobile phones. **The winning solution will receive a \$20,000 award.**



Millions of tonnes of explosives remain underwater in oceans, lakes, and coastal waters following conflicts across the globe. The challenge addresses a crisis affecting regions from the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to Yemen and Ukraine, where the presence of underwater explosives hampers fishing, delays infrastructure development, and increases insurance costs for humanitarian operations by millions of dollars.

Beyond the risk of detonation, corroding ordnance can leach toxic materials and carcinogenic chemicals into surrounding waters, threatening the health of communities who

depend on these water bodies for their livelihoods and food. Current detection methods require military-grade equipment or remotely operated vehicles costing up to \$250,000 per unit, putting them out of reach for most affected communities. The UNDP **challenge seeks practical alternatives that non-specialists can safely operate from small boats.**

Freelancer has delivered over 20,000 solutions to NASA and US government agencies through its open innovation platform. Previous challenges have produced machine learning models protecting billion-dollar space missions, water management algorithms that reduced simulation times from 72 hours to 60 minutes, and breakthrough spacecraft refueling designs. The platform connects complex problems with 85 million users across more than 200 countries and territories.

"Traditional R&D has a ceiling – the expertise in your building," said **Trisha Epp, Freelancer's Director of Innovation**, who architected the company's NASA portfolio. "When you're working on truly difficult problems like underwater explosive detection, the breakthrough might come from a materials scientist in Singapore, a sonar expert in Norway, or an engineer working in offshore drilling. Open innovation gives you access to all of them simultaneously."

"The person who can solve an impossible problem might be anywhere on Earth – they might approach it from an angle traditional experts would never consider," said **Matt Barrie, Chief Executive of Freelancer**. "We've proven this works for NASA's toughest technical challenges. Now we're applying the same approach to help communities stay safe from underwater explosives."

UNDP is also supported in this project by [SeaFreight Labs](#), an open-innovation consultancy using global challenges to cost-effectively deliver breakthrough innovation.

Submissions close March 9, 2026 – the full challenge brief is available at:
<https://www.freelancer.com/contest/UNDP-Affordable-Tools-to-Find-and-Mark-Underwater-Explosive-Ordnance-2672027/details>

For more information, contact:

Media Inquiries

Brent O'Halloran

Director of Communications

press@freelancer.com | +1 (650) 442 3334

About Freelancer

Thirteen-time Webby award-winning Freelancer is the world's largest freelancing and crowdsourcing marketplace by total number of users and projects posted. More than 80 million registered users have posted over 25 million projects and contests to date in over 3,000 areas as diverse as website development, logo design, marketing, copywriting, astrophysics, aerospace engineering and manufacturing. Freelancer owns Escrow.com, the leading provider of secure online payments and online transaction management for consumers and businesses on the Internet with over US\$8 billion in transactions secured. Freelancer also owns Loadshift, Australia's largest heavy haulage freight marketplace with

over 800 million kilometres of freight posted since inception. Freelancer Limited is listed on the Australian Securities Exchange under the ticker ASX:FLN and in the United States as FRLCY.