Geneva Diary: Report from the GICHD

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completed the first phase of olfactory detection and discrimination of seven explosive bases in controlled conditions (see photo above). The average discrimination index achieved by the six subjects (four females and two males) was 90 percent. The results were replicated with a group of subjects that were the first group’s offspring that grew in the laboratory. These rats were exposed directly to other species such as cats, dogs and humans, which helps sensitize them to the smells they are likely to encounter in an actual minefield.

Hope for Progress in Mine Detection

Currently, the open-field phase of detection (see photo at left) is being developed near the Animal Behavior Laboratory of the Escuela de Estudios Superiores de Policía (Graduate School of Police) in Bogotá under the direction of Dr. Luisa Fernanda Méndez Pardo. While research is ongoing, initial results have already been reported in several national and international media.2-4

Colombia’s progress in the detection and deactivation of explosive remnants of war could make the country a vital part of the solution to the anti-personnel landmine problem. If this research project proves successful in real minefields, as with the African giant pouched rat, relief from mine contamination is well on its way for the war-torn country. See Endnotes, Page 78

Explosives-detection field training of a rat in an open field at the Graduate School of Police, Bogotá, Colombia.

Laudo Fernando Méndez Pardo has a veterinary degree from La Salle University in Bogotá, Colombia. She specialized in college teaching and also in explosives- and drug-detection canine. Currently, Méndez Pardo is a researcher in the Animal Behavior Laboratory of the Escuela de Estudios Superiores de Policía in Bogotá. Since 2005, she has directed the research project “Detection of Explosives Using Rattus norvegicus, Veteran rats.”

Andrés M. Pérez-Acosta graduated with a degree in psychology from the National University of Colombia in 1996. He obtained his doctorate in experimental psychology from the University of Seville, Spain, in 2001. Currently, he is Associate Professor in the Psychology Department of the Universidad Nacional de Bogotá, Colombia. Since 2004, Pérez-Acosta has been Editor-in-Chief of the International Journal of Psychology Avances en Psicología Latinoamericana.

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The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining provides operational assistance to mine-action programs and operators, creates and disseminates knowledge, works to improve quality management and standards, and provides support to instruments of international law.

Over the past few months, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining has helped coordinate a conference on cluster munitions and taken part in a workshop on explosive remnants of war for an international security forum. The GICHD also began promoting the Bibliomines, an online resource for mine-action documents in French. This edition of the Geneva Diary discusses some of these recent activities in further detail.

Berlin Conference on the Destruction of Cluster Munitions

The Berlin Conference on the Destruction of Cluster Munitions was hosted by the German Federal Foreign Office in collaboration with the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 23–26 June 2009. The GICHD supported the GFFO in the substantial and organizational preparation of the conference, and the United Nations Development Programme, sponsored by Norway, arranged the travel for about 40 officials from developing countries to attend the meeting. The two-day conference gathered 84 of the 98 signatories to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, including nearly all those with cluster-munitions stockpiles. Representatives from nongovernmental organizations, international organizations and companies working on cluster-munitions stockpile destruction also participated in the conference. Altogether the attendance totaled 274 persons.

The objective of the Berlin conference was to support the timely implementation of Article 3 (stockpile destruction) and related obligations of the CCM, and to maintain the momentum of its signing ceremony in December 2008. Experts from both states and civil society gave presentations organized in thematic sessions that led to fruitful discussions. Further details can be found on the Web site at http://www.berlin-ccm-conference.org.

International Security Forum

The 8th International Security Forum was held in Geneva 18–20 May 2009. The GICHD arranged a workshop titled “Explosive Remnants of War, Human Security and Development” that included a range of speakers from mine-action programs and NGOs. The session
IEDs: A Major Threat for a Struggling Society

The use of improvised explosive devices by guerrillas, drug cartels and paramilitary groups has threatened Colombian society for the past 30 years. This article examines the types of IEDs found in Colombia, and the extent and history of its IED problem. Also outlined are the Colombian government’s efforts to counter IEDs, and possible solutions to the challenges ahead, such as enhanced intelligence and community security.

Colombia, located in the northern tip of South America, is the country in the Western Hemisphere most affected by improvised explosive devices. Its level of contamination is comparable to countries like war-torn Iraq and Afghanistan, where international forces deem IEDs a major threat to their plans and to the security of their personnel.

by Pablo Esteban Parra Gallego [ PAICMA ]

Types of IEDs Found in Colombia

There are few conventional landmines found in Colombia. Instead, landmines are generally improvised explosive devices used as anti-personnel landmines (that is, victim-activated). An IED is a bomb fabricated in an improvised manner that incorporates destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic or incendiary chemicals. IEDs are designed to destroy or incapacitate personnel or vehicles. In Colombia, these devices were used recently to counter the advance of the Colombian Armed Forces during their struggle to eliminate illegal groups in the country. These groups also use IEDs to protect coca crops, and to frighten the population that may collaborate with the government forces.2

Most of the IEDs produced in Colombia fall into one of the following categories:

1. House-borne IEDs: Devices in any kind of building, rigged to detonate and cause collapse shortly after a military unit enters. These IEDs have become very popular to attack bombing/clearance squad and specialized anti-terrorism teams.

2. Vehicle-borne IEDs: Devices that use a vehicle as the package or container of the IED. They come in all shapes, colors and sizes, depending on the type of vehicles available. Donkey-drawn carts, bicycles, motorcycles and ambulances have also been used in attacks on Colombian Armed Forces. Their destructive power relies on the quantity of explosives and the amount of shrapnel generated during the detonation.

3. Booby traps: IEDs contained in a variety of objects like cell phones, radius, balls, cooking pots and even corpses. They are...