

A National Mine Action Institution: The Cambodian Mine Action Center

With peace and a new government in place in Cambodia, the country has turned its attention to the debilitating mine situation. Leading these efforts is the Cambodian Mine Action Center, an all-civilian national demining program.

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Background

Cambodia is a country roughly twice the size of Virginia. It shares borders with Thailand to the northwest, the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the north, Vietnam to the southeast and the Gulf of Thailand to the southwest. The country was plunged into a long period of war and political uncertainty when in March 1970 former Head of State Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown. Following a five-year struggle, in April 1975, the communist Khmer Rouge regime captured Phnom Penh, the capital city. It ordered the evacuation of all cities and towns. Over 1 million displaced people died from summary execution or forced

labor. In 1978, Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia, inciting war. The Vietnamese drove the Khmer Rouge to the Thai border and installed a new regime in January 1979 that touched off 13 years of fighting. The "Paris Peace Agreement" signed in October 1991 put an end to the conflict, though the Khmer Rouge remained an obstacle to the security, peace and stability of the country until its downfall in 1998.

Cambodia has only recently emerged from decades of conflict—conflict that displaced millions of its people and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. The battles that ravaged most of the country have left Cambodia with a menacing legacy of modern warfare: landmines and UXO. These explosive devices, particularly AP mines, are strewn throughout the country.

Landmine casualties are a fact of life in Cambodia. More than 40,000 mine victims are struggling to survive, many having paid the price of lost limbs. Many are blind. About the same number of victims have been killed by landmines. More than 2,900 square kilometers of the country are infested by landmines, which continue to kill and maim the innocent population. At present, the full extent of the mine problem is not accurately known. However, current estimates approximate the landmine contamination to number from 4 million to 6 million landmines. During periods of conflict, the military used landmines for defensive purposes and civilians used them to protect their private property. The use of landmines was generally widespread and no records were kept, making the identification of mine fields difficult.

In the early stages of the Cambodian mine action program, the information about the quantity of landmines and the location of mine fields was obtained through interviews with the local population, as well as with former soldiers. The task of determining the location and number of landmines effecting Cambodia's borders and fields was an uncertain and daunting one for mine action proponents. It was in this climate of uncertainty that the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) was created under the auspices of the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). In Annex 1 of the Paris Peace Agreement, one of the UNTAC

mandates called for assistance in clearing mines, undertaking training programs in mine clearance and a mine awareness program to help educate the Cambodian people. The mission of CMAC was to achieve an atmosphere in Cambodia where people are free of the threat of mines and UXO, thus allowing reconstruction and development activities to take place in a safe environment. In this respect, CMAC has defined and executed four main programs: mine awareness, mine field information, mine and UXO clearance and training in mine clearance. These programs were carried out according to well-defined priorities. The highest priority concerned humanitarian purposes—the resettlement of displaced persons. The second concerned economic purposes, including the expansion of agriculture, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development projects.

The disintegration of the Khmer Rouge's political and military powers, and the subsequent formation of a new government after the general election in 1998, created a political stability that aids Cambodia's continued social and economic development. In this new era of peace, the Cambodian

national mine action program is becoming part of the national development plan. The result is a national mine action program that will grow as a function of social and economic aspects that are being assessed in the National Level One Survey. This survey took place last year, with the generous support of Canada. In 2001, Cambodia will gain a clearer picture of the social and economic impact of landmines. On the other hand, the planning process and the priorities of the mine action program are worked out in close cooperation with other stakeholders in development fields. Mine action in Cambodia is no longer an isolated operation. The benefits of mine action in the realms of casualty reduction and land use, as well as in socioeconomic impacts on vulnerable factions of the general population will be more accurately measured in the future.

CMAC Achievement

Since its inception, CMAC has been a center of joint efforts between the Cambodian people and the international community to fight against landmines. Thanks to many generous contributions, the expertise of the donor community and the regular assistance of the Royal Government of Cambodia, CMAC has become a model of a successful national demining program. At the end of 1998, CMAC employed a workforce of nearly 3,000 well-qualified Cambodian deminers and had formed an important national landmine database—a precious demining asset for the country.

Until 1999, the mine action program worked to reduce the rate of casualties. The latest report presented by the Cambodia Mine Incidents Database Project indicated a total of 60 casualties for November 2000, compared with the monthly average

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of 600 casualties in 1992. This reduction in casualties is the mine action program's top accomplishment as Cambodia emerges from the turmoil of a long armed conflict.

■ CMAC deminers mark a portion of the lush, but mine-filled Cambodian countryside. c/o CMAC

Challenges and the Reform Process

The rapid growth of CMAC caused some difficulties. In 1999, the organization was plagued by constant mismanagement. This led CMAC to engage in an important reform process in order to regain the confidence of both donors and the Cambodian government. The strategy for reform consisted of: 1. Change where necessary and appropriate in order to increase the overall transparency, efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in humanitarian mine action. 2. Retention of the many positive elements of CMAC that have been developed in the past. 3. Emphasis of CMAC's core values of safety, cost effectiveness, honesty and integrity, appropriate technology, and expertise.

The result of CMAC's reform process is a mission that is unwavering in its efforts to save lives and support development for Cambodia. However,



■ CMAC official marks a mine field. c/o CMAC

■ Mud from heavy rains can limit transportation and wash landmines out of mine fields and into the paths of civilians. c/o CMAC



due to serious financial difficulties, CMAC is not yet able to totally complete the reform process. In the meantime, a review mission and an socioeconomic evaluation of CMAC have been commissioned and assigned by UNDP in order to assess the structural reform and the socioeconomic component of CMAC. UNDP believes that CMAC's service delivery and regulatory responsibilities must be separated. There is a general and commonly held assumption that the current CMAC mandate is too broad "to be everything to everybody"—national planning and coordination body, major provider of mine and UXO clearing services, provider of survey and mine awareness, national technical training center, and research and development institute. As a result, there is a consensus of opinion that CMAC should focus on quality of work over quantity of roles.

CMAC: Mine Action Service Provider and CMAA: Mine Action Regulator

In September 2000, the Cambodian government established a new mine action authority called the Cambodian Mine Action Authority (CMAA). The new authority will take over from CMAC the responsibilities of national planning, coordinating, and monitoring of mine action in Cambodia.

In addition, the authority will undertake the following tasks: accreditation and licensing of mine action operators (principally those involved in mine and UXO clearance); advocacy work in relation to the elimination of landmine stockpiles, usage and reporting as required by Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention; development of national standards (including survey, clearance, EOD and mine awareness); maintenance of a national mine action database and

dissemination of mine action information; and status as a focal point for the implementation of the national law. CMAA is not yet fully operational as its stakeholders' roles and responsibilities in mine action are being considered.

In the current reform process, CMAC is prepared to transform itself into a national mine action service provider. The center will retain its special status as a national institution with a clear mission to implement the four core programs: mine awareness, mine field information, training in UXO and mine clearance.



■ Children play perilously close to a mine field. c/o CMAC

Conditions Conducive to Successful Mine Action

From lessons learned in Cambodia and other mine action programs, there are two main factors that influence the establishment of a mine action program: donors and the government. Without the two, mine action cannot be carried out successfully. For more than seven years, donors have played a vital role in the development of CMAC. They are welcome to oversee the management of their contributions within CMAC.

A steering committee of donor representatives was first established to function as a review and advisory body for the use of trust fund resources. The committee convenes every six months to review progress reports, work plans, and consider new policy and operational recommendations. Until the end of 1998, the level of donor funding was approximately \$12 million (U.S.) per year. Given the current state of Cambodia's economy, donors are requested to maintain the same level of funding for five to 10 years. It is suggested that long-term commitments will help long term

planning. CMAC welcomes all support (financial, equipment and technical) from donor communities, NGOs or private agencies either through UNDP General Trust Fund, UNDP Earmarked Trust Fund, Project Management Unit (PMU), in kind donations, or by contractual arrangements.

In 1999, CMAC received \$8,594,491, of which \$7,989,086 came from the UNDP Trust Fund. In 2000, CMAC received only \$6,298,000. The recently reconfirmed and renewed commitment of donors

to maintaining capacity building and financial support to CMAC is widely considered by all deminers as a sign of optimism and hope. The overall commitment of about \$5 million to the General Trust Fund for 2001 is a positive outreach. Unfortunately, it was still necessary and very painful for CMAC to reduce its staff by 1,937 people as of Nov. 13, 2000.

The Cambodian government exerts great influence on the mine action program. CMAC needs government support not only in terms of financial contributions but also for political, diplomatic and legal support. In 2000, CMAC received \$700,000 from its government. At the national symposium on mine action in Phnom Penh on Sept. 16, 2000, the prime minister announced that the government's financial contribution to mine action for 2001 would be approximately \$780,000. CMAC has also been aided in its mine action efforts by Their Majesties the King and Queen, the National Assembly, the Senate, the Civil Administration, the Royal Armed Forces, the National Police and the general public. However, since external donor funding will likely diminish in years to come, the government must be prepared to increase its financial contributions to CMAC. From CMAC to the Cambodian government and donors, the conditions most conducive to a successful mine action program are based on trust, understanding and transparency.

Donor Community and Mine Action Funding in Cambodia

When UNTAC withdrew from Cambodia in 1993, the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) and the U.N. Department for Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) jointly launched a project entitled "Assistance to Demining in Cambodia." The



■ Cattle graze beside a marked mine field. c/o CMAC

project was funded by the UNDP Trust Fund, which was established for this purpose. The initial phase of the project (Phase I) consisted of two major components, both executed by the U.N. Office for Project Service (UNOPS). The first component assured the administration of an international trust fund and provided the framework through which donors could contribute military technical advisors to assist CMAC in meeting its operational objectives. The second component was financed from UNDP core funds. It provided technical assistance to CMAC to allow it to run as an efficient and autonomous national organization. The initial two-year project, running from 1994-96, was followed by a second two-year phase of support (Phase II: 1996-98) and by a third two-year phase of assistance (Phase III: 1998-2000).

Leading up to 2000, CMAC received \$57.06 million from the U.N. Trust Fund. The major donors included Australia (\$10.49 million), the Netherlands (\$9.36 million), Sweden (\$8.02 million) and Japan (\$7.8 million). Other donors included: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Holy See, Norway, New Zealand, South Korea, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and

the United States. In 2001, through an UNDP earmarked trust fund, France will finance the demining of an archeological site.

Australia is the biggest contributor to the trust fund. In May 2000, former Australian Ambassador Malcolm Leader made public that CMAC has gone a long way to meet the criteria for reform as set by donors and that Australia wants CMAC to continue as an organization. He said Australia has faith in CMAC and believes it has the capacity to perform its mine clearance activities.

The current Australian Ambassador Louise Hand told a national symposium on mine action in September 2000, on behalf of the donor community, that Cambodia is a leader in the preparation of a vision that aims to move mine action in this country beyond an emergency or high capacity phase and into a longer term and ultimately sustainable development phase.

The Cambodian government has also contributed financially to CMAC through the trust fund. However, an agreement between UNDP and the government put this contribution into a "sub-trust fund" titled the "Royal Government of Cambodia's Contribution to the Governing Council and



■ Continued support is needed for demining efforts.
c/o CMAC

CMAC.” The rules and procedures governing this sub-trust fund are quite different from those of the UNDP Trust Fund. It is important to note that Cambodia is the only country in the world that has made a financial contribution to the U.N. Trust Fund under the custody of UNDP to support its own mine action.

Aside from the trust fund, other contributors to CMAC included the European Union (EU), Germany, UNHCR, UNICEF, CARE/UNDP, NPA and some private donors. In April 2000, a program initiated by the U.N. Association-USA was introduced to Cambodia. Since the beginning of the program, the United States has also provided in-kind donations to CMAC.

Other Mine Action Operators in Cambodia

NGOs have also combined efforts with CMAC. Halo Trust and Mines Advisory Group (MAG) are two British NGOs who were actively involved in mine clearance since the

start of the mine action program. NPA provided support for resettlement, rehabilitation and community integration. Handicap International (HI) provided support to landmine victims with disabilities, the social rehabilitation in provinces, and capacity building of disabled people to the Cambodian Red Cross's database of mine victims. Other NGOs included Jesuit Service Cambodia, Marynoll and the Cambodian Red Cross. Cambodia is grateful to all governments and NGOs that have aided its mine action efforts. However, in order to attain a state of zero victims and work towards the eradication of landmines throughout the country, Cambodia needs additional external support.

Conclusion

The horrid legacy of landmines and UXO in Cambodia will be apparent for years to come as casualties continue to mar daily life. Yet, in a land hindered by years of political and social instability under the Khmer

Rouge regime, the safety improvements of the late-1990s and early-21st century are symbols of significant advancement. The hope for future improvements in the realms of mine clearance, safety and program management will lie in the alliance of government agencies and NGOs, alike. CMAC and various NGOs have laid the foundation for continued success and improvement. The key now will be the integration of the CMAA into demining activities and the continued support of donors—small feats when one considers how far Cambodia has come in the past 10 years. ■

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