Afghanistan

Country Profile

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AFGHANISTAN

HISTORY

Afghanistan is predominantly an Islamic country that gained full independence from British rule in 1919 after centuries of rule. Since that time, it has changed from a monarchy to a republic, leading up to a Soviet-supported coup in 1979 that caused over 5 million Afghans to flee the country. The United States funded rebel groups in the 1980s in an attempt to force Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which finally occurred in 1989. However, continuing conflicts throughout the 1990s caused millions of Afghans to remain in countries like Pakistan and Iran, while the landmine situation was further exacerbated.

LANDMINES/UXO OVERVIEW

While 665 square km of land have been cleared of mines and UXO since 1993, about 7.17 sq. km of Afghanistan remains contaminated. Of this total, 13.7 sq. km are considered high priority. The breakdown of the affected areas is as follows: 61 percent grazing land, 26 percent agricultural land, 7 percent roads, 4 percent residential areas and 1 percent irrigation systems. This breakdown, which includes many heavily trafficked areas, has partly caused the exploitation of thousands of Afghans. In 1999, 72,098 people were relocated following demining efforts.

REALITY CHECK

Due to years of stilling conflict, Afghanistan finds itself lagging behind much of the world in terms of literacy rates, educational facilities and urban development. These deficiencies increase the need for mine awareness education for the general population. In 1999 alone, 979,640 people received mine awareness education—a sign of progress, although mine awareness organizations clearly still have their work cut out for them.

AFGHANISTAN

DEMINSING

From 1990 to April 2000, 205,842 AP mines, 9,199 AT mines and 1,054,738 UXO were cleared from Afghan fields, roads and residential areas. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) estimates that between governmental organizations and NGOs there are about 5,000 mine action workers implementing mine action programs in the country.

CAMBODIA

HISTORY

The Republic of Cambodia was battered throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s by civil war and, most noticeably, the Khmer Rouge regime. After 30 years of near constant conflict, Cambodia is one of the world’s most landmine and UXO-affected countries. As areas formerly controlled by the Khmer Rouge were freed, numerous mine casualties were reported.

LANDMINES/UXO OVERVIEW

The Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) believes that 644 square km of land is mined in the country, with an additional 1,400 sq. km suspected of mine contamination. Many of the landmines affecting Cambodia are found along the Thai border, where a majority of fighting has occurred since 1979. Meanwhile, the country is also affected by UXO remaining from the Vietnam War. In 1998, a U.S. Department of State report estimated the number of mines in Cambodia to be about 4 million—6 million, although the actual figure is unknown.

REALITY CHECK

While the effects of the Vietnam War, civil conflicts and the Khmer Rouge regime are still felt throughout the country, Cambodians can take solace in the fact that the Khmer Rouge has been reintegrated into the population and, currently, no significant guerrilla factions exist in Cambodia.

CAMBODIA

DEMINSING

A majority of the demining performed in Cambodia is attributed to villagers. CMAC, the military, the NGOs Mines Advisory Group (MAG), and Halo Trust, and some commercial firms. From 1993 to 1999, villagers cleared 69,780,000 sq. m., bettering even CMAC’s 53,875,460 sq. m. Since demining began in Cambodia, about 155 sq. km have been cleared, including 8,000 AP mines, 70 AT mines and 91,131 UXO stretching across 11.86 sq. km in 1999.

REALITY CHECK

Although the number of casualties decreases at a considerable rate in Cambodia, 1,012 people were killed or injured by landmines in 1999, a 41 percent decrease from the previous year. From January to May 2000, 417 casualties were reported—a rate of about 83 per month, compared to 84 per month in 1999. These numbers show significant improvement in the last four years—casualties occurred at a rate of 254 per month in 1990. Unfortunately, the number of mine-related accidents involving children has increased from 16 percent in 1996 to 30 percent through May 2000. This increase is generally attributed to the increase of resettlement and land clearance times of repatriation from Thai border camps.

CAMBODIA

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AFGHANISTAN

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