Organization of American States Mine Action Program

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United States Southern Command, SOUTHCOM

SOUTHCOM has humanitarian demining programs in several Central American countries. With help from the OAS, SOUTHCOM is able to make progress in helping this area become mine free.

Promoting Mine Awareness

In 1998, SOUTHCOM started a humanitarian demining program in support of the Peruvian peace accords. Missions are task organized using SOF and integrating Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) into missions starting this year.

The Psychological Operations (PSIO) detachment provides mine awareness programs using surveys to determine the best way to distribute the information. This program has used standard mine awareness signs, as well as posters, Superman comics, printed t-shirts and school supplies to promote mine awareness. The detachment will be conducting post-tests of the program's effectiveness.

Background

SOUTHCOM uses the US Army Special Operations Force (SOF) to conduct humanitarian demining. It is fortunate to be able to provide support in Central America, Peru and Ecuador through a regional organization, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Mine Action Program (IMAD). These organizations assist in developing and supporting humanitarian demining programs.

SOUTHCOM has supported OAS/IMAD in Latin America since 1995.

Program Summaries

Mr. Gorton also summarized the program in each country within the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility:

Honduras: In the final phase of its demining program and by September of this year, it will be a mine-safe country.

Nicaragua and the OAS/IMAD support an ambitious demining program. Over 600 people are involved in units on multiple fronts. IADB also supports regional headquarters of international supervisors, the Mission of Assistance for the Removal of Mines in Central America (MARMINCA), located in Managua, which coordinates all training in Central America. Guatemala has primarily a UXO problem, which will require another 6-8 years for removal. Volunteer mine-sweepers working in coordination with the military will clear remote areas.

Costa Rica has a small mine problem that will require up to two years to complete.

Operations in Ecuador and Peru are focused along a 78-kilometer stretch of the border between the two countries, which is a disputed area. It has been heavily mined and remote, making for difficult and treacherous work.

Upcoming plans include four missions per year divided equitably between Central America and Peru/Ecuador.

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Organization of American States Mine Action Program

Countries worldwide are supporting OAS' efforts to clear landmine-stricken areas in Central America by implementing a mine action program that will teach courses in demining techniques and supervise and monitor mine clearance operations.

The Problem

Central America was a theater of military conflicts for several decades leading up to the 1990s. During these conflicts, landmines were used by both government and irregular forces. The majority of the mines used were manufactured outside the region, but some improvised explosive devices were also used by armed insurgent groups. In some cases, mine fields were recorded with varying degrees of accuracy and detail. As a result, they were neither marked nor documented in any way. Mines were placed around military and economic facilities, including telecommunications installations, power lines and bridges, as well as along trails and roads.

Long after these conflicts have ended, the deadly legacy remains in the form of thousands of anti-personnel mines that continue to threaten large numbers of people living in Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and Guatemala. In many rural areas, the local population fears this threat, and the re-establishment of normal patterns of life remains elusive. Numerous tracts of needed agricultural land remain unusable, placing an added economic burden on these areas and leaving entire communities isolated and economically depressed. Even with the increased risk of living and working in or near mine fields, the pressures of the population and the economy have forced many people to remain in these zones. The danger to the physical well-being of the people of Central America, as well as the impediments that landmines pose to economic recovery and democratic governance, have made their elimination an urgent humanitarian task.

The Response

The Central American peace process, which took root in the past decade, helped resolve the internal conflicts in the region and created a favorable climate for strengthening economic development and democratic institutions. As a result, countries struggled to consolidate peace, their governments asked the Organization of American States (OAS) for assistance in addressing landmine issues. In 1991, the Secretary General of the OAS, with technical advice from the International Development Board (AIDB), requested that the member states and the permanent observer of the OAS cooperate in this task. Under a series of mandates from the OAS General Assembly, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy of the OAS General Secretariat assumed overall responsibility for the conduct of this pioneering and innovative initiative, which became known as the Assistance Program for Demining in Central America (PADC). Since the program's inception, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, the United States and Venezuela have provided military engineers and other specialists to teach courses in demining techniques and supervise and monitor mine clearance operations. Other countries, including Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United...
The OAS has continually expressed a firm commitment to support the Member States in eliminating the danger of landmines. In the years since PADCA was initiated, the program has developed beyond an assistance program focused primarily on mine clearance in Central America into a comprehensive, multi-faceted mine action effort throughout the Americas dedicated to the total elimination of landmines and the conversion of the Western Hemisphere into an AP landmine-free zone. The OAS has also called on the component organizations of the Inter-American System to participate in the development of programs to support mine risk awareness and preventive education, physical and psychological rehabilitation of victims and socio-economic reclamation of demined zones. As the overall goals of the program have evolved, the Organization has expanded PADCA into an effort to address all aspects of the mine problem throughout the Hemisphere, called Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines (AICMA). The AICMA program incorporates the previously existing demining assistance effort into its structure and serves as the focal point for the OAS on all landmine issues.

In accordance with the Ottawa Convention of 1997, which prohibits the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of antipersonnel landmines among signatory countries, the OAS has asked Member States to ratify and comply with the Convention. The Organization has also established a landmine registry for the Western Hemisphere and has supported the development of new demining programs in the Americas for all affected countries requesting assistance. Moreover, the OAS, through the AICMA program, has emphasized assistance to Member States that are signatories of the Convention and request assistance with landmine stockpile destruction in order to meet their obligations.

**Program Goals**

The OAS Mine Action Program

**Challenges and Accomplishments**

To date, the greatest challenge to mine clearance has been found in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan Government has reported that some 135,000 landmines were buried throughout the country during the 1980s. Mined areas include land around electoral towers, bridges, communications facilities and power plants, as well as along the country’s borders with Honduras and Costa Rica. Although Nicaraguan Government officials have reported the elimination of more than 62,000 landmines since clearance efforts began, approximately 73,000 mines remain to be located and destroyed. Following Nicaragua’s signing and ratification of the Ottawa Convention, the Nicaraguan Army has also destroyed 84,000 stockpiled antipersonnel mines. The OAS and members of the international donor community have provided assistance with stockpile destruction, including international experts to monitor the process.

In Honduras, demining operations began in September 1995, and since that time, ten operational mod- 

dules have been supported, resulting in the destruction of more than 2,200 mines. As a result of these operations, numerous tracts of land have been re- claimed and turned over to local authorities for development. In November 2000, Honduras became the first of the OAS Member States to eliminate entirely its stockpiled antipersonnel mines when the Honduran Army destroyed its reserves of nearly 8,000 mines.

Demining activities began in Costa Rica along the border of Nicaragua in October 1996. With support from AICMA, the Ministry of Public Security has undertaken both mine clearance operations and a public awareness component to prevent accidents involving the civilian population. To date more than 300 of the estimated 1,000 existing mines and unexploded devices have been found and destroyed. Because Costa Rica possesses no stockpiled mines, completion of demining operations will convert it to a mine-free nation. Following the signing of a peace agreement in Guatemala, the OAS provided assistance in developing a mine and unexploded ordnance clearance program, which was launched in 1998. The Guatemalan National Commission for Peace and Demining has overall responsibility for the national project. Also participating in the program are the Volunteers Firemen’s Corps, the Guatemalan Army and de-mined members of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union. Operations in Guatemala are somewhat unique within the OAS program, as the primary threat comes from the approximately 8,000 unexploded devices, including mortar and artillery shells, aerial bombs and hand grenades, which are scattered throughout Guatema- lan territory. The clearance process requires extensive cooperation among the three operational components, as well as a concerted effort to communicate with the population of affected zones in order to locate and destroy hazardous items.

Since 1999, Peru and Ecuador have carried out demining activities along their common border as a key component of their agreement to re- solve longstanding territorial issues. The OAS reiterated its support for these and other related mine action efforts in Resolution 1745 issued during the June 2000 General Assembly meeting. An agreement to support a program in Ecuador was finalized in March 2001, with the initial phase of activities to focus on mine stockpile destruction. A similar agreement between the OAS and the Peruvian Government was signed in May 2001. Ecuador and Peru have both expressed interest in carrying out accelerated stockpile destruction with international assistance. In each country, the international community has provided or promised more than $1 million (U.S.) to operate the initial stages of these mine action programs.

**The Future**

The AICMA program continues to grow as additional OAS Member States seek assistance in dealing with their own landmine issues. In keeping with renewed mandates from the OAS General Assembly, the program has responded to requests for support from the governments of Peru and Ecuador in addressing their shared problem of a common border contaminated by some 130,000 landmines. OAS aid is programmed to include technical, financial and logistical assistance in det- racting their anti-personnel mine stockpiles.

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**States** have generously donated finances and equipment to this humanitarian task.

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**Organizing the Effort**

Based on nearly ten years of mine action experience, the OAS assistance program has developed a planning system using operational modules of six months in duration. Modules are based on an agreement between the affected country and the OAS. It includes an operating budget that estimates resources required for the specified time period. This approach has ensured both effective and transparent use of the funds provided by the international donor community and has maximized the efficiency of mine action activities in Central America.

The OAS program provides a significant amount of the equipment and logistical support needed by the affected countries. Technical equipment, including mine detectors, protective clothing and other specialized items, are provided to permit the safe detection and destruction of landmines and to give the national deminers the confidence necessary to carry out their tasks. Other support, such as supplementary rations, life insurance and medical coverage, is also part of the complete package that AICMA offers.

Each of the countries supported by the program provides its own personnel and units to conduct mine clearance. The number of deminers involved in operations has grown to nearly 900 in Central America, as the need for broader action has become apparent. Mine-affected countries also provide logistical support within their national capabilities, as well as medical care and emergency evacuation in the case of accidents involving program personnel.

Some 30 international supervisors have been provided by members of the IADB, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela. Other nations, including Canada and the United States, have periodically provided military personnel to give training or technical advice on demining and landmine stockpile destruction. The activities of international military supervisors, trainers and technical experts are coordinated by the Mission for Mine Clearance Assistance in Central America (MARMINCA), which is based in Managua, Nicaragua and operates under the control of the IADB.

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**In Nicaragua**

A supper demining in Nicaragua.

**Marion Orozco, aged 10 years old, was a victim of landmine, loss of leg below the knee, arm below the elbow and his left eye.**

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**The first of 5,000 antipersonnel mines destroyed by the Nicaraguan government.**
About the Organization

The Organization of American States (OAS) is the oldest regional organization in the world, whose principle idea of creating an association of states in the Western Hemisphere dates to the 19th century. The Charter of the Organization, adopted in Bogotá, Colombia in 1948, declares that the promotion and consolidation of representative democracy is one of its central principles. The actions that the OAS has undertaken to promote democracy in the Hemisphere have varied since its foundation, but the basis for these actions has remained unified in democratic ideals. Through the years, the Organization has become more actively involved in its support for democratic governance in the Americas.

In 1999, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy was established within the OAS General Secretariat to provide guidance and support to member states to strengthen their democratic institutions and processes. The Unit's main objective is to provide effective and immediate response to OAS member states' requests for advice or assistance in modernizing or strengthening their political institutions and democratic processes. One of the priority program areas of the Unit is Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines. Since 1995, the Unit has been responsible for the general coordination and supervision of OAS mine action efforts, with the technical support of the Inter-American Defense Board.

AICMA is constantly searching for new technologies to increase the speed, efficiency and safety of clearance operations. With the financial support of the United States, a mine detection dog component has been used within the program since 1999 to enhance area reduction and quality control systems. In the near future, mechanical clearance equipment will be introduced into Nicaragua with both U.S. and Japanese assistance.

In collaboration with the Swedish Government, a pilot program has been operating in Nicaragua since 1997 to assist with the physical and psychological rehabilitation of mine victims. More than 300 people who have no social security or other insurance benefits have been provided with transportation from their communities to the program's rehabilitation center, as well as lodging, nourishment, prosthetics, therapy and medications. As the scope of mine action activities expands, partnerships with other international and non-governmental organizations are taking on greater importance. Significant cooperation with the United Nations is maintained on several projects, including the establishment of a mine action database, which was funded by a grant from the U.N. Mine Action Service. AICMA is also developing a joint mine risk education and landmine accident prevention project with UNICEF that will target children in Nicaragua. Important efforts are also being made to coordinate AICMA's victim assistance component with other international programs in conjunction with the Pan American Health Organization, the Center for International Rehabilitation, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration and the Inter-American Council for Integral Development. Other significant collaboration continues with important mine action nongovernmental organizations, including the Canadian Landmine Foundation, International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Landmine Monitor, Landmine Survivors Network, Mine Action Group, Survey Action Center and Las Damas de las Americas.

The countries that benefit from this program have made a significant commitment to sustain their national efforts to eliminate the mine problem, but their efforts require continued international support to succeed. With sustained and enthusiastic assistance from the donor community, the goal of making the Western Hemisphere a mine-free zone as soon as possible is both tangible and achievable. Demining in Central America should be completed by the end of 2001 in Honduras, 2002 in Costa Rica, 2004 in Nicaragua and 2005 in Guatemala.

Landmines are being made more lethal and harder to detect and clear. Thus greater efforts are required to detect and clear minefields. The program since 1999 has more than doubled the clearance and transport of cleared land from their communities.

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IMSMA in Nicaragua

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**Background**

Recognizing the need for a centralized source for mine-related information, the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) created the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) in April 1998, assisted by the Center for Security Studies and Conflict Research (EPR) at Zurich's Institute of Technology (ETH). The United Nations (UN) approved the IMSMA Field Module in January 1999, accepting it as the standard for gathering demining information on an international level.

The primary objective of the GICHD is the promotion of international cooperation in the field of mine action, something it hopes to improve by implementing the IMSMA. The system strengthens the UN's role—and in particular the role of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS)—as the primary international resource for information and decisions related to landmines. It is used as a reference by mine action organizations and individuals and as a method for setting the standards for their projects.

The system offers its users a number of benefits, including:

- Creating international standards for demining activity
- Providing general information as well as technical support
- Enhancing overviews and management of projects
- Aiding proper monitoring, planning and implementation of programs
- Increasing options for personnel distribution
- Improving the safety of deminers and the general public
- Reducing costs for Mine Action Centers (the GICHD provides the international mine action community with the Field Module for free.)

**The System**

The system is structured as a network through which organizations can provide input and assess mine-related data. It was developed based on previously existing mine action programs and the necessary support tools. The IMSMA consists of two autonomous but integrated information management systems, namely the Field Module and the Headquarter Module. The two modules process information on different levels.

The Field Module is based on standard software such as Microsoft Access and ArcView and combines a relational database with a geographical information system (GIS). Organizations enter data into their Field...