AICMA: Helping Central America

Organization of American States

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AICMA: Helping Central America

Since its creation in 1998, Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines (AICMA) has been devoted to numerous landmine issues. AICMA and its partners have accomplished a great deal throughout the continent.

by Organization of American States (OAS)

This report describes the activities conducted by AICMA. Between June 2000 and May 2001, periodic reports were provided to the Committee on Hemispheric Security of the OAS Permanent Council (OAS/P) and the work completed and the use of allocated funds.

Introduction

To address the complex, difficult and persistent issues related to the crisis caused by anti-personnel mines, the program known as "Comprehensive Action Against Anti-personnel Mines" (AICMA) was created in the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy in 1998. This program is the focal point within the General Secretariat for landmine issues and covers the following topics:

- Mine risk awareness education for the civilian population
- Support for minefield surveying, mapping, marking and clearance
- Victim assistance, including physical and psychological rehabilitation and the socioeconomic reintegration of cleared zones
- Destruction of stockpiled mines
- Support for a total ban on the use, production, stockpile and sale, transport or export of anti-personnel mines

At its 30th regular session, the General Assembly approved resolutions AG/RES. 1745 (XXX-O/00), "Support for Action Against Mines in Peru and Ecuador" and AG/RES. 1751 (XXX-O/00), "Support for the Program of Integral Action Against Anti-personnel Mines in Central America."

Assistance Program for Demining in Central America (PADCA)

Background

PADCA was created by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1991, at the request of the Central American countries affected by anti-personnel mines. Since May 1995, responsibility for the general coordination and supervision of PADCA has been assigned to the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD), with the technical support of the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB). The distinctive feature of PADCA, which is an integral component of the AICMA program, is that it is largely a humanitarian project, since it seeks to restore safe conditions and the confidence of citizens, to reduce the threat and danger posed by explosive devices and antipersonnel mines, and to restore the use of the lands dedicated to agriculture and livestock in affected zones. Furthermore, it is a multilateral program, since a number of donor and contributing countries (such as Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, El Salvador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Guatemala, Holland, Honduras, Japan, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United States, and Venezuela) and various organizations (such as the OAS and the IADB) participate in it.

Role of the UPD

The main responsibilities of the UPD/OAS within PADCA are to raise funds in the international community, to administer and oversee the use of those funds and to coordinate the Program from a political and diplomatic standpoint. This responsibility also includes the task of ensuring that all the essential components of each national demining project are in place and functioning properly. This includes a system for communications, evacuation and emergency; the provision of food and equipment for demining troops; insurance; and a stipend for all supervisors andapper soldiers involved in operations and appropriate mine-clearing activities.

Technical Assistance

The IADB is responsible for organizing the international team of supervisors in the four countries participating in the Program (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). At the moment, the international team of experts is composed of about 30 supervisors who are responsible for providing technical and logistical support, training demining troops, and providing certification that demining operations are appropriate and meet international safety standards. In September, Guatemala became the first PADCA beneficiary country to provide the chief of the international supervisory team, known as the Mission of Assistance for the Removal of Mines in Central America (MARMINGA). The change in leadership followed the training and integration of new military supervisors from the seven OAS Member States (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela). International Support

The successful work completed and progress achieved by PADCA is, in large measure, due to the invaluable and generous support of member states such as Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela and the United States, as well as the contributions of major international donors, including Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, the Russian Federation, South Korea, Spain and Sweden. Over the course of one year, these contributions have amounted to approximately $6 million (U.S.).

Coordination with International Entities

United Nations

Significant cooperation with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) on several mine action projects enhanced both the coordination and execution of the AICMA program over the past year. The establishment of a mine action database was made possible by a grant from UNMAS, which supported computer software, training and initial operation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). This system, which was developed under the sponsorship of the Swiss Government for the benefit of the international community, was installed and maintained in the PADCA office in Nicaragua. Important progress was also made in coordinating UNMAS and AICMA program support for the mine action programs in Peru and Ecuador.

• Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

GICHD, as the organization designated by UNMAS to coordinate and revise International Mine Action Standards, has worked directly with the AICMA program to establish a user focus group for review and comment on draft standards. The first phase of this review took place in Managua in January 2001 and was attended by demining program managers from Central America, Ecuador, Peru.

• Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO)

During the course of the year, AICMA coordinated closely with PAHO with the aim of working cooperatively on activities related to assistance, rehabilitation and integration of mine victims, as well as on awareness education of the population about the danger of these devices.

• Trust for the Americas

In order to promote victim assistance initiatives, the Program established and broadened contact with the Trust for the Americas, seeking to establish a cooperative relationship with the private, public and academic communities, as well as with different civil society institutions in the hemisphere.
During this period, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) and the OPCAS, through AICMA, continued joint efforts on issues related to mine-risk accident prevention education. As a result, the Bank contributed funds to support mine accident prevention campaigns in Honduras and Nicaragua. Similarly, a workshop will be conducted to analyze the socio-economic impact on mine-affected communities in Central America. The primary objective of the workshop will be to consolidate information on the lasting effects of mines on the population in order to be presented at the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention and socio-economic recovery of communities that have been demined. In that regard, the Bank's funded projects to support mine accident prevention campaigns in the three countries were successful. These projects confirmed that the conclusion of the current Mine Action Convention in September 2001 will complete demining of the Honduran side of the border with Nicaragua.

According to the Bank, the Group of Experts on Preventing Mine Risk Accidents and Unexploded Ordnance (GPV) will be assisted by the countries in the region to continue the threat reduction process. The recent efforts on this issue were initiated by the Bank in 2001, with a particular focus on the Caribbean region. The Bank will continue to support mine risk accident prevention campaigns in the region, including those in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Bank will also continue to support the implementation of the Ottawa Convention, which has been ratified by all countries in the region except for Colombia, which has not yet ratified the Convention. The Bank will continue to support the implementation of the Convention and the ongoing efforts to reduce the threat of mine risk accidents and unexploded ordnance in the region.
dissuade the inhabitants in the municipalities of San Marcos de Colon, Cholotenango Department. PADCA supported the initiation of a continuing nation-wide radio campaign in Nicaragua with Radio Corporación, using a character from a popular national program, "Pacho Madrigal," to convey mine awareness messages. The Latin American television network, Telemedio, visited and filmed the program's activities in Nicaragua to broadcast during its newscasts. In Guatemala, PADCA received an award from UNICEF for a public awareness campaign it developed entitled "No Juguemos con la Muerte" ("Let's Not Play with Death") in October 2000.

Victim Assistance

The "Program for Care to Victims of Mines and Explosive Devices," which had existed in Nicaragua since 1997, was continued and strengthened in the past year in the assistance to the victims of the civil war. Since its inception, the program has addressed the specific needs of the communities involved by providing victims who have no social security or army benefits with transportation from their communities to the rehabilitation center, as well as lodging, nourishment, prostheses, therapy and medications. The program maintains victims' records that include information concerning personal identification, home community, type of injury, type of prostheses, account of the accident, and in most cases, photographs of the victim. The humanitarian work under this program, with an overall budget of $275,000, has provided care for about 300 persons who would otherwise have had no chance of rehabilitation and reintegration into productive life in their communities. In addition, limited immediate medical support has been provided to mine accident survivors using medical personnel and resources assigned to each of the Nicaraguan demining units until the victims could be assisted through the OAS Victim Assistance Program. In the past year, the program's rehabilitation center in Nicaragua also assisted two mine victims from Costa Rica, who received medical treatment, prostheses and meals. In Guatemala, the program has also supported a program operating in an independent living center that is presently home to several disabled young people, who range in age from 14 to 35. They receive basic medical treatment, counseling and vocational and educational training. They are also trained in independent living, a philosophy that states that with the right skills, tools and information, a person with a disability is capable of directing his or her own care and leading a productive and happy life. The program also provides services to the disabled community by offering counseling and care management, peer support groups and a resource library.

Stockpile Destruction

The role of the AICMA project in promoting the elimination of stockpiled anti-personnel mines in the Latin American countries has expanded significantly over the past year. In collaboration with the government of Canada, the program hopes to raise $1 million from international donors, who will manage support efforts by requesting Member States to destroy their stockpiles prior to the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in Managua this September. This project, known as the "Managua Challenge," encompasses the destruction of all stockpiled mines by the Ottawa Convention signatories of the Americas and the finalization and presentation of all reports required under Article 7 of the Convention before the Managua meeting in September.

To that end, the Nicaraguan government continued the effort initiated in 1999 to destroy all of the 130,000 warehouse mines under its control. Representatives of PADCA and the IADB international supervisory team participated in the certification of the destruction of mine stockpiles in the Department of Esteli, bringing the total number of stockpiled mines destroyed to 68,899 by the end of 2000. Nicaragua has set the destruction phase of remaining stockpiles to be completed as soon as possible and hoped to complete by September 2001. They receive basic medical treatment, counseling and vocational and educational training. They are also trained in independent living, a philosophy that states that with the right skills, tools and information, a person with a disability is capable of directing his or her own care and leading a productive and happy life. The program also provides services to the disabled community by offering counseling and care management, peer support groups and a resource library.

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