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Bob Kudyba

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The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, along with eight other local NGOs, are working to rid their lands of the mixture of AT and AP mines laid in conventional military patterns during conflicts dated back to 1935.

By Bob Kudya, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center Background

The conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia can be traced back to before the period of Italian colonization, which commenced in 1935. Many attempts to secure an independent Eritrea finally succeeded in 1993, when Ethiopia gained formal independence from Ethiopia. However, relations soured between the one-time allies when Eritrea introduced its own currency (the Nakfa) in November 1997, creating a trade war between the two nations.

On May 13, 1998, Ethiopia’s Parliament declared war on Eritrea. After the 1998 fighting failed to achieve any clear advantage to either side, the Ethiopians and Eritreans fell into a trench warfare situation reminiscent of World War I. In order to reinforce this system of trench lines, extensive patterns of mines—both AT and AP—were laid to strengthen and reinforce the positions. As one side gained advantage and took control of a trench system, mines were laid on the opposite side, creating a confusing array of defense systems. Shelling of targets by artillery and bombing attacks by aircraft contributed to the problem with UXO littering the battlefields. In fact, some estimates say that UXO outnumber the problem of mines 15:1.

The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea in Algiers on 18 June 2000, provided for an immediate cessation of all armed and air attacks and requested the assistance of the UN and the Organization of African Union (OAU) in its implementation. In particular, the parties called on the UN to deploy a peacekeeping mission under the auspices of the OAU to monitor the cessation of hostilities.

This process is for the continuation of proximity talks between the two parties, leading to a comprehensive peace agreement on issues related to the final definition of the border between the two countries; the current border is the old Italian Colonial border. This undertaking has yet to be resolved, particularly the agreement on the final border definition and line.

With respect to demining and mine action activities, the agreement says, “... both parties shall conduct demining as soon as possible with a view to creating the conditions necessary for the deployment of the Peacekeeping Mission, the return of civil administration and return of the population as well as the demilitarization and demarcation of their common border. The Peacekeeping Mission, in conjunction with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will assist the parties’ demining efforts by providing technical advice and coordination. The parties shall, as necessary, seek additional demining assistance from the Peacekeeping Mission.”

Landmine and UXOSituation

In addition to the residual threats posed by landmines and UXO from old conflicts, the recent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998–2000) poses a significant threat throughout the conflicted area. This threat is primarily confined to the “no man’s land” that runs between the trenches along the confrontation lines (May 1998 and May–June 2000).

These mine fields contain a mixture of AT and AP mines that are laid mainly in conventional military patterns. Additionally, unmarked and unrecorded nu-
The UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has been implementing the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Mine Action Program on its behalf, initially focusing on the humanitarian assistance for victims of war, including the removal of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and unexploded remnants of war (RMs). This program has successfully cleared over 10,000 hectares of land, saving thousands of lives. UNMEE has worked closely with local communities and NGOs to ensure the safety of affected populations.

NGOs in Eritrea

There are currently eight NGOs undertaking programs in Eritrea, including the Eritrean Demining Agency (EDA), Danish Church Aid (DCA), Danish Demining Group (DDG), HALO Trust, RONCO, RONCO/EDA and Mines Awareness Trust.

Eritrean Demining Agency

The EDA includes the following personnel:

- One 60-person manual team deployed after a successful training phase in Sector Centre.
- Two 60-person manual teams deployed after a successful training phase in Sector West.
- One 6-person MRE team located in Sector West.

The EDA has also been supported by three international Staff members from MineTech, a commercial company, who are working as Technical Supervisors in support of three EDA national teams.

Ronco/Ronco/EDA

Ronco/Ronco/EDA is made up of:

- One 60-person manual clearance team.

Mines Awareness Trust

Mines Awareness Trust contains the following teams:

- Four 6-person community based teams developing a community-based MRE program to implement in both Sector West and Centre.

Mine/UXO Clearance Operations

In 2001, the MACC consolidated its position within the UNMEE MACE concept of operations and established an extremely productive capability. Several new appointments have arrived to complement the existing MACE infrastructure, bringing a wealth of experience from other programs such as Yemen, Bosia, Kosovo, Northern Iraq and Azerbaijan.

Clearance activities have centered on the TSZ, primarily in the western and central sectors. Priority is given to clearing areas where there is a confirmed landmine and UXO threat that impacts the local population or potential refugee population.

Large areas of the TSZ were surveyed by the HALO Trust. A comprehensive National Landmine Impact Survey will be undertaken in 2002. This will permit an extensive review of dangerous areas and the allocation of resources, including MRE programs and mine victim support activities. This will be extensively supported by the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database.

Mine contamination is extensive, and many mine types have been encountered within the region. The UXO contamination problem, while not unique, is responsible for a great percentage of accidents, particularly with teen-age males, who are attracted to the shape and color of UXO and investigate objects out of boredom or curiosity. A recent spate of incidents caused by deeply buried AT mine is a reason for concern and has led to the MACE working actively with the UNMEE force and related agencies in a concerted attempt to defeat the menace.

Training and National Capacity Building

With the arrival of additional international personnel, a training development plan has been mapped out, focusing on building national capacity. Basic demining and team leader courses have been successfully completed, with Train-the-Trainer and Technical Survey courses to follow shortly. The focus of Train-the-Trainer courses will be to provide a core of national training cadre to staff the proposed National Training Centre, which is to be designed and constructed at Asha Golgo, outside Asmara. This training center will be responsible for all national demining training activities and will be managed under direction of the Eritrean Mine Action Program (EMAP). The focus of this project is to build a sustainable national capacity for all demining activities in Eritrea.

EOD/UXO Problem and Solution

Eritrea has a serious UXO contamination problem; some 280,000—250,000 mines and three million pieces of UXO are said to be present in Eritrea. Older sources estimate between 500,000 and one million landmines. Either way, the amount of UXO limiting Eritrea outnumbers the landmines by at best 3:1 and at worst 15:1. Perhaps as many as three million pieces of UXO remain at large in Eritrea. The majority of women and children killed or injured in Eritrea as a result of the de facto war in recent times have been struck down by UXO and not by landmines.

The range of UXO types encountered in Eritrea varies, although, as in most conflict environments, the vast majority are comprised of the smaller weapons of war such as grenades (including an array of rocket-propelled grenades), mortars and artillery projectiles. There are significant numbers of other

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FOCUS: National Mine Action Programs

The QA department of the UNMEE MACC currently consists of a Chief of QA with two International Supervisors and three National QA Inspectors. These are divided into a headquarter element and two field teams. The aim of the QA department is to develop national capacities to assume responsibility for these functions in the future.

The QA department performs a number of roles and is rapidly developing capabilities in coordination, monitoring, and conducting investigations. The responsibilities are achieved by implementing a comprehensive accreditation and licensing process based on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) as well as other mine action program documentations, from which the QA department has developed National Technical and Safety Standards (TSS). The TSS are harmonized with IMAS and NGOs. There are in-house departments that address the emergency and other external needs. They maintain information on mine risk education, field questionnaire results, administrative data, etc.

All IMAS, GIS and relational database data is stored physically in the headquarter. The QA department is involved in the process of a series of networks of PCs operating on Windows 2000. The main features, which are collected through standards, focus on $\text{ numen }$ action agencies, the Eritrean Defence Force and individuals.

The QA approach being implemented in Eritrea is effective at this early stage of the program; the numbers of non-compliance are generally low, and to date there have been no denoting related accidents.

**IMSA**

One of the mandates of the MACC is to provide mine action information to UNMEE, other UN agencies, NGOs, and mine action agencies working in Eritrea. This includes the collection, processing, and dissemination of all mine-related information.

The primary tool in the management of mine action information is the IMSMA database, The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETHZ) and the University of Applied Science providing the necessary financial and human resources to conduct and ensure immediate and long-term MRE programs in Eritrea.

In collaboration with the UNMEE/MAC, EMAP and UNICEF, first launched critical emergency awareness activities in high-risk areas of Gash and Dash Behar. In the meantime, UNICEF has assigned a full-time mine awareness coordinator to the UNMEE MACC to ensure a strong and long-term integrative mine action activities in Eritrea.

The UNICEF-MRE Coordinator assists EMM, EDA, UNMEE MACC, government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs in developing a comprehensive and well-integrated MRE program. This program aims to address the emergency and long-term MRE needs of high-risk communities throughout Eritrea. This context, EMM, in partnership with UNICEF and UNMEE MACC, has already established an inter-agency MRE working group, which consists of all agencies, national and international governments, and NGOs.

The group meets monthly in Asmara. A MRE instruction was founded on a regional level. This group meets regularly. In August 2001, UNICEF sponsored an inter-agency MRE workshop in Asmara to review emergency MRE activities in Eritrea and to identify key aspects of longer-term MRE strategy for Eritrea, emphasizing improved implementation capacity, awareness raising, and policy making.

**Mine Risk Education Strategy for Eritrea**

Starting in 1994, limited MRE activities were carried out in the context of the Eritrean Humanitarian Demining Program (EHDP). These were subsequently suspended in 1998 due to the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. After the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in 1999 and the establishment of the TFS/B, the technical support of UNICEF and the Eritrean Demining Agency (EDA) resumed MRE efforts in the form of emergency activities in the regions of Tessenat and Gash Behar. These activities were mainly concerned with the relocation of populations.

Since 2000, UNICEF, whose mandate under the UN mine action policy is to assume responsibility for MRE activities, has been mobilizing the necessary financial and human resources to conduct and ensure immediate and long-term MRE programs in Eritrea. The UNICEF MRE program aims at institutional and local capacity-building in MRE community facilitator's training, coordination and reporting mechanism establishment and the MAAE integration in mine action and other humanitarian sectors.

The following is a list of the program's specific objectives:

- Establishing a national institutional MRE capacity.
- Coordinating MRE activities at the national and regional level.
- Integrating MRE activities with mine action and other humanitarian actions.
- Establishing national MRE training capacity.
- Coordinating community-based MRE in affected communities and for IDP
- Conducting MRE for returning refugees and following up with their specific communities.
- Incorporating MRE into the school system.
- Developing a multi-media strategy for MRE.
- Conducting landmine safety training for peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel.

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MRE activities in Eritrea have been described in a specific report, which provided a background on the landmine problem in Eritrea.