The Americas: Regional Mine Action Seminar in Peru

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**NOTES FROM THE FIELD**

The Americas: Regional Mine Action Seminar in Peru

During a two-day conference in Lima, Peru, participants reaffirmed their collective commitment and dedication to becoming a hemisphere safe from AP mines.

**by Julie Mullen, MAIC**

**Introduction**

This summer, the Organization of American States (OAS), along with the governments of Peru and Canada, hosted the Americas Regional Mine Action Seminar. The conference was held in Lima, Peru, on August 14 and 15, 2003. Representatives from countries all over the western hemisphere, as well as many international organizations, gathered to review their efforts to rid the hemisphere of AP mines. The two-day conference was dedicated to learning from each other's experiences, preparing for the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention that took place in Bangkok, Thailand, in September 2003, as well as supporting and assisting each other in completing the goals set by the individual countries. Through this conference, the region reaffirmed its collective commitment and dedication to becoming a hemisphere safe from AP mines.

**Proceedings**

In his opening remarks, Colonel William A. McDoung, the General Coordinator of the Comprehensive Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines program of the OAS, asked all participants to remember to look ahead to goals their countries envision accomplishing next and the best way to do so, instead of focusing solely on what has already been done. With these goals set, the first day of the conference focused on national and regional planning and priority setting. Country presentations were given by Peru, El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Colombia, Suriname, Venezuela, Honduras, Argentina, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. Each presentation focused on individual goals, accomplishments, methods used, organizations involved in mine action within each country and progress made toward their collective goals. Organizations such as the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICH), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Mine Action Information Center (MAIC), the Regional Program of Rehabilitation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) gave informative presentations as well.

An interactive discussion of the different aspects of mine action, such as mine clearance/mine risk education (MRE), victim assistance, and destruction of stockpiled mines and information exchange, occupied the second day of the conference. Each discussion was facilitated by two moderators who presented the conclusions of their group's discussion at the end of the day. There was also an MRE puppet show, as well as a speech given by a landmine survivor.

**Conclusion**

Closing remarks focused on developing an agreement of regional priorities and goals for 2004. The experience and expertise of each participant made the conference a success. The regional commitment of upholding the Ottawa Convention was reaffirmed and new goals were set to keep the region on the road to becoming a hemisphere safe from mines.

**Data Collection and Use**

Mine-affected countries in Latin America range from those still dealing with newly seeded landmines (e.g., Colombia) to those that are virtually mine-safe (e.g., Costa Rica), therefore one might suspect that there would be very little consensus about the subject of managing mine action related information. In fact, the countries of the region reached agreement on some valuable guidelines relating to this critical subject:

- As a start, identify what information is needed and how it will be used. This will result in collecting only need-to-know information and will result in a more streamlined methodology for collecting and using information. It also will not "burn our" the sources of direct, first-line information providers. It was observed that often too much information is collected that marks or renders pertinent information unusable. If preparation is made in defining needed information and the best methods for collecting and disseminating it, much work, which might have to be done later, could be eliminated "up front."
- Identify each agency or organization that has a valid interest in receiving landmine-related information. This will set the stage for productive dialogue and pro quo relationship within the government and with coordinating organizations such as the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It may also create a demand for persistent information, thus ensuring its continued support within the government. It can help "shape" the way data is collected and provided to others for the most convenient interface. The sharing of information will also facilitate mainstreaming of mine action activities within the broader context of socio-economic development.
- Over 130 participants from 12 nations took part in spirited discussions and focused work groups that attempted to frame key data collection and victim assistance issues. The ideas that surfaced there and the suggested "next-steps" were so insightful that we thought it important to share them through this forum.

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**Bits and Bytes From Bogota**

In mid-November, the U.S. Department and the Organization of American States (OAS) co-sponsored a regional meeting hosted by the government of Colombia dealing with mine action in Latin America. The goal of the meeting was to identify important concerns and solutions which would help define a clearer way ahead for obtaining and managing casualty data and for carrying out more effective victim assistance programs.

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