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# Faces of Mine Action: Daniela Jiménez Alcázar

**B**efore working in humanitarian demining, Daniela Jiménez Alcázar was involved in demarcation and boundary maintenance between Ecuador and its neighbors, Peru and Colombia. After receiving a degree in geographic engineering at *Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador* and a geographic-information systems (GIS) master's degree from Universidad San Francisco de Quito, she worked as a cartography technician for the National Institute of Statistics and Census and GIS specialist for the Secretary of Community and Social Movements in Ecuador. Because of her extensive education and experience with cartography and GIS, she was recommended for her current diplomatic role as third secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs representing the National Demining Center of Ecuador (*El Centro Nacional de Desminado Humanitario del Ecuador* or CENDESMI). Her knowledge of GIS systems and cartography is especially useful since CENDESMI operates the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), works with maps of mined areas and collects field data for demarcation of newly discovered mined areas.<sup>1</sup>

## Contamination in Ecuador

As a result of the brief Cenepa War (26 January–28 February 1995) between Ecuador and Peru, landmines were planted on both sides of the countries' common border. The contamination is mostly concentrated along Ecuador's eastern border in the *Cordillera del Cóndor* mountain range, which was at the heart of the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1998 peace accord between Ecuador and Peru, both countries have emphasized bilateral cooperation, mutual trust and transparency between their respective mine action agencies, CENDESMI and the Peruvian Mine Action Coordination Center (*El Centro Peruano de Acción contra las Minas Antipersonales* or CONTRAMINAS), in order to solve their landmine problem.<sup>3,4</sup>

Between 1995 and 1998, landmines contaminated an estimated 2,126,986 sq m (525.6 ac) of land in Ecuador. Today, 466,872,500 sq m remain contaminated with an estimated 15,595 landmines, spanning three provinces: Morona Santiago, Pastaza and Zamora Chinchipe.<sup>2</sup> These landmines pose a serious threat to Ecuador's citizens, especially to indigenous communities in the *Cordillera del Cóndor*. The Shuar and Ach-



Daniela Jiménez Alcázar (left) with CISR program assistant, Paige Ober, at the 2013 Senior Managers' Course graduation in May 2013. Photo courtesy of CISR.

uar people depend on agriculture and hunting, which makes landmine encounters more prominent.<sup>5</sup> Due to the isolation of these communities, determining the exact number of landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) survivors in Ecuador is difficult. Responsible for clearing the existing contaminated areas, Jiménez Alcázar and her CENDESMI colleagues manage and coordinate various tasks pertaining to humanitarian demining, including administrative duties and training.

## CENDESMI

Within the field of humanitarian demining, CENDESMI's responsibilities are primarily administrative. The organization coordinates with international donors, works closely with the Organization of American States (OAS), receives donations and arranges meetings for the international teams monitoring the demining process. CENDESMI also coordinates the activities of the "Walking Together" program, a bilateral mine action program between the governments of Ecuador and Peru.

While collaborating with the Ministry of Defense and its personnel who carry out demining operations, CENDESMI



also trains demining teams on the proper use of technical equipment and demining procedures. Evaluation of safety conditions in the field also falls under CENDESMI's authority.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to administration and clearance activities, CENDESMI annually provides mine risk education (MRE) and victim assistance with the help of OAS.<sup>1</sup> MRE is primarily taught at schools and community centers to educate children and adults about the risks of landmines and UXO. These programs are particularly important for the inhabitants of Ecuador's eastern region, where mine contamination is the most prominent.

As third secretary, Jiménez Alcázar partakes in most of the activities in which CENDESMI is involved. She manages many of the administrative tasks including arranging meetings, coordinating with donors, and corresponding with the Peruvian embassy and CONTRAMINAS. Jiménez Alcázar also manages the demining operations by organizing training for the demining teams and evaluating security and safety conditions in accordance with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).<sup>1</sup>

#### Challenges

One of the main challenges affecting CENDESMI's demining operations is the tentative availability of its team members. Deminers are members of the military and are only assigned to these positions for two years. After members are reassigned, CENDESMI receives a new group of soldiers who require training. As its workforce is frequently replaced, excessive amounts of time and resources are devoted to training personnel.

Despite this inconvenience, military personnel are the only entities capable of carrying out demining operations due to their knowledge of the terrain and adept survival skills in jungle environments, where unpredictable weather could leave them stranded. Notably, the helicopters that transport deminers to the field require clear weather to operate. If the weather worsens after a helicopter drops them off, deminers must wait in the field without Internet access or mobile telephone service until the weather clears, so that the helicopter can return. On occasion, up to three or four days pass before bad weather dissipates and helicopters can safely be used to extract deminers from the field.

Decreasing international support presents challenges for CENDESMI. The organization currently receives support from OAS, which, with funding from donor states, provides much of

the supplies that deminers require. These include technical equipment, mine detectors and protective gear. The most important benefit OAS provides is insurance in the event that deminers are injured or killed on the job.

Due to the weakened economic state of many donor countries, international support for demining is decreasing. In response to reduced external funding, CENDESMI is coordinating with the Ministry of Defense an investment project that will allot funds from the government of Ecuador for demining equipment and training to ensure that Ecuador achieves its mine-free goal by the 2017 deadline set by Article 5 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention).

*Megan Hinton, an editorial assistant at the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR), interviewed Daniela Jiménez Alcázar when Jiménez Alcázar attended the 2013 Senior Managers' Course (SMC) in ERW and Mine Action at James Madison University. For more information about the SMC visit the CISR website at <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr>.*

#### Endnotes

1. Daniela Jiménez Alcázar, email correspondence with author. 12 August 2013.
2. "Ecuador." Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor. <http://tinyurl.com/k5vfdsw>. Accessed 1 July 2013.
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5. "República del Ecuador." Centro Nacional de Desminado Humanitario del Ecuador. 2008. <http://tinyurl.com/mohru3l>. Accessed 1 July 2013.