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Humanitarian Demining Symposium in Šibenik, Croatia

by **Nicole Neitzey** [[Center for International Stabilization and Recovery](#)]- [view pdf](#)

This article highlights the events of the 9th Annual Humanitarian Demining Symposium and Equipment Exhibition in Šibenik, Croatia, held 24–26 April 2012.

For three days in late April, more than 200 mine action representatives from dozens of countries attended the annual Humanitarian Demining Symposium in Šibenik, Croatia. The Croatian Mine Action Centre and its Centre for Testing, Development and Training organized and hosted the event. A number of distinguished delegates attended the Symposium, including the German ambassador to Croatia, His Excellency Dr. Bernd Fischer, who reminded the attendees during the opening session that Croatia plans to join the European Union next year. He also encouraged them to do more to assist their prospective member state in becoming free from the scourge of landmines.

This year's Symposium was the biggest in its nine-year history. The full schedule included presentations and demonstrations on topics involving the application of new general survey technologies, underwater survey and demining, and the use of demining machines and mine-protected vehicles. Throughout the workshop, participants could visit an exhibition room to view the equipment of various manufacturers and meet with company representatives.

Presentation Highlights

Presentations and demonstrations filled Day 1 of the Symposium. Experts represented the research and development as well as the operational side of the community. They shared their knowledge and experiences with the participants on subjects that included recommendations on standards and procedures, underwater demining challenges and techniques, and the importance of quality assurance. The significance of applying different technologies to mine action was a common theme throughout the workshop, in part demonstrated by the fact that the Symposium was the gathering site for the 10th Robotics for Humanitarian Demining Workshop under the International Advanced Robotics Programme: Humanitarian Demining and Equipment Exhibition 2012.

I had the opportunity to present on the Study of the Effects of Aging on Landmines, which James



The scenic Croatian coast was the setting for the 2012 Humanitarian Demining

Madison University conducted in partnership with C King Associates with grants from the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).¹ The topic generated active discussion among participants. Many participants expressed thanks that the issue was explored and brought up for discussion and consideration. Others cautioned that the findings should not be taken out of context nor too broadly generalized, as experiences may be quite different with other types of ordnance (such as larger munitions) or mines in different climates from those studied. In general, the popular consensus agreed that aging is an important issue for the community, requires further study and should be accounted for in operations—particularly in terms of recognition of items.

Symposium and Equipment Exhibition, where operators, technology experts and other mine action representatives from around the world convened to share their knowledge and advance the field.
All photos courtesy of CISR.

The workshop strongly promoted an initiative known as the Toolbox Implementation for Removal of Anti-personnel Mines, Submunitions and UXO (TIRAMISU)—an effort by the EU to gather information on various aspects of mine action efforts to make them accessible to everyone in the community.² The working group's members come from seven countries, incorporate 24 organizations and include representatives that work as mine action experts, scientists in research and development of various technologies, end users and advisers. They seek to reduce costs and provide greater benefits to mine action efforts by networking with various actors in the community.

Field Demonstration

Day 2 focused on equipment and included a trip to Gaj Field, a nearby simulated test site where participants witnessed a handful of machines demonstrate their capabilities of ground preparation and demining. Those present included the ARMTRAC 75t-230; BOŽENA 5; DIGGER D-3, MV-4, MV-10 and PT-300; REMU screening bucket and RM03; and Samson 300 and VF-100. Inclement weather left the test site muddy, stressing the machines' performances especially on the obstacle course, which included a steep gradient that the small- and medium-sized machines had to ascend and descend. Regardless of the conditions, all fared well, and the landmine-like explosions each machine set off during its trip down the makeshift minefield lanes made the simulation more realistic.



Participants gathered at Gaj Field near the town of Skradin to see several demining and ground preparation machines in action.

Afterwards, the manufacturers were given the opportunity to demonstrate their hand-held equipment in the exhibition room. Presenters included representatives from Armtrac Limited, DIGGER DTR, DOK-ING, ĐURO ĐAKOVIĆ Special Vehicles, EbingerPrüf- und Ortungstechnik, FAE Group, PrimeTech, Cluster for humanitarian demining Ltd., Istraživač, MineWolf Systems, REMU, Saab Bofors Dynamics Switzerland Ltd, Vallon, Vilpo and WAY INDUSTRY. Participants could view and handle the equipment, pick up promotional materials and interact with the manufacturers to discuss the capabilities of their equipment and ask pertinent questions.

Conclusion

In a field as vast and broad as mine action, it can be easy to get caught up in one specific area; therefore, this event's wide array of topics was important. As large areas of land become more accessible and the threat of underwater mines becomes more defined, underwater demining

seems to be an area open to expansion and greater consideration for the community in coming years. On this topic, presenters stressed that underwater mines are safety and environmental hazards in most of the world's oceans.

Overall, the Symposium was an important international assembly with opportunities for learning, understanding, networking and connecting with colleagues. Generally, innovators meet with other innovators and operators meet with other operators. The Symposium, however, allowed innovators and operators to interact, which should happen more frequently in mine action. As the event has grown, I would suggest lengthening it to allow presenters more time to speak and engage the audience in discussion.

Above all, the Symposium is a significant event for advancing certain aspects of the mine action community. It is encouraging that this event is widely attended by people from all over the world annually. The organizers stated their commitment to holding another international symposium next year, again in Šibenik, Croatia; the dates were recently announced as 23–25 April 2013. 🌐

Biography



Nicole Neitzey is the Program Manager/Grants Officer for the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery. She was formerly Technical Editor and Managing Editor for *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* and has worked for CISR since 2001. She graduated from James Madison University in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts in Technical and Scientific Communication and an Online Publications Specialization. In her work at CISR, she has served as Project Manager for the Pathways to Resilience Program, the Study on U.S-Origin Landmines, Consortium for Complex Operations Portal Review project and State Department CD-ROM project. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in public administration from JMU.

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Endnotes

1. "Study of the Effects of Aging on Landmines." *Center for International Stabilization and Recovery*. http://c isr.jmu.edu/research/aging/aging_intro.html. Accessed 3 August 2012.
2. *TIRAMISU: Toolbox Implementation for Removal of Anti-personnel Mines, Submunitions and UXO*. <http://fp7-tiramisu.eu>. Accessed 3 August 2012.

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