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Organization of American States

The Organization of American States was established in 1948 with the signing of the Charter of the OAS in Bogotá, Colombia.¹ The OAS was created to help the member states attain “an order of peace and justice, to promote their solidarity, to strengthen their collaboration, and to defend their sovereignty, their territorial integrity, and their independence.”¹ All 35 independent Latin American states are members of the OAS, which serves as the primary governmental forum in the Western Hemisphere in which states participate to implement their shared goals and resolve disagreements.¹

The OAS serves a multitude of purposes, but the organization focuses on four main categories: democracy, human rights, security and development.¹ The OAS’s continued involvement in Haiti following the recent earthquake exemplifies these principles. In January 2012, OAS Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza called on the international community to organize aid-coordination efforts with the Haitian Government.² To support Haiti, the OAS not only created assistance projects and worked to manage the Group of Friends of Haiti organization but also agreed to provide millions of dollars in aid to Haiti.² In addition, Ambassador Albert Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, stressed the importance of providing investment opportunities and building capacity in Haiti in order to provide long-term benefits and security to Haitians.²



Another area of involvement for the OAS is demining.³ In 1992, the OAS created the Program for Assistance to Demining in Central America to confront the threat of anti-personnel landmines in Central American countries, including Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.³ In 1997, PADCA expanded into the *Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal* (Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines or AICMA) to effectively address the humanitarian impact of landmines. The OAS tackles this through its efforts to build and assist national capacity for demining, mine-risk education and victim-assistance services with the aim of restoring safe living conditions, returning land to productive use and assisting those members of the population who have suffered as a result of the use of landmines.³

AICMA’s efforts in Central America, supported by the Central American governments and a coalition of more than 20 donor countries and international organizations, including the United States, ultimately led to Central America

becoming the first region in the world to entirely rid itself of the “negative impact of anti-personnel landmines left behind from past conflicts” in 2010.⁴ To accomplish this, the OAS managed more than US\$100 million dollars in donor contributions and in-kind assistance to provide technical, logistical and administrative support to national mine-clearance operations, as well as to conduct mine-risk education campaigns and provide assistance to victims of anti-personnel mines.⁴ AICMA in particular concentrated on the social rehabilitation of landmine survivors, which included mental and physical recovery and work placement.⁴ As Central America is now mine-impact free, the OAS has shifted its primary focus of support to South America, aiming to rid Ecuador and Peru of the impact of landmines by 2017, and to make Colombia mine-impact free by 2021.⁴ In 2012, AICMA plans to administer administrative and logistical support for humanitarian demining in seven mine-affected Colombian municipalities as well as attend to the formation of a canine-demining component.⁵ AICMA also continues to support mine clearance in the *Cordillera del Condor* region on the border of Ecuador and Peru, and plans to conclude mechanical clearance work in the *Catamayo-Chira* River by June 2012.⁵ Despite the numerous challenges it faces, such as the threat of Colombian illegal-armed groups that persist in using mines and improvised explosive devices against civilians and military forces, as well as the thousands of mines still located in remote areas near the Ecuadorian-Peruvian border, AICMA remains committed to its goal of making the Americas the first anti-personnel landmine-free region in the world.⁵ 🏳️

~ Paul Gentine, CISR staff

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Endnotes

1. "Who We Are." *Organization of American States*. http://www.oas.org/en/about/who_we_are.asp. Accessed 12 January 2012.
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