July 2009

U.S. Department of State Humanitarian Mine-action Support in Colombia

Edmund Trimakas

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol13/iss1/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
The national level, where the demining impact resulted in the improvement of education, the health system and transportation. Affected communities noted a sense of safety and confidence in their immediate environment as the most positive aspects of the demining. After demining operations, people living in the affected communities felt themselves safe from the threat of mines and as a consequence could move about their community with confidence that they would not step on a mine. Given that the main goal of humanitarian demining is to return cleared areas to productive use, the goal was reached.

There is a need to direct initiatives toward land rehabilitation once land has been released. Likewise, it is necessary to develop financing and technical cooperation proposals to assist formerly affected communities to improve the use of released land. National and local authorities must monitor cleared land in order to optimize its use.

The study results clearly show that mine-risk education campaigns have contributed directly to the development of landmine-affected communities. The population highly values demining operations. Community leaders, utility companies and government entities involved in infrastructure development also share this assessment. The population also found the main economic benefit resulting from demining operations in the agriculture sector.

Mine-risk education campaigns have considerable coverage since the surveyed population knows about the dangers posed by landmines and ongoing demining operations to reduce those dangers. Campaign results were decisively positive since they reduced dangerous behaviors.

The study clearly shows that landmine-affected communities were seriously affected at several levels before demining and reclassified as impact free, but it also shows the benefits from the humanitarian-demining efforts pursued by the populations and their leaders.

The study also provides important information for national authorities to develop projects that would benefit the population living near dangerous areas, and to pursue full socioeconomic rehabilitation of these areas.

See Endnotes, Page 112
Colombia’s Future

There are several factors that need to be overcome to make operational clearance in Colombia successful. These include:

- Lack of technological readiness
- Limited coordination integration within the affected communities’ five-year planning process
- Labelling of IDPs as agents of the government, which is retarding progress and preventing progress to and association with Colombian authorities
- Conflict among Colombians and international authorities about the extent of required clearance

In addition to addressing these challenges, planners have not determined a satisfactory intermediary course between full-scale cleanup and community integration and timely deployment to the many communities requiring assistance. The two U.S.-sponsored projects in Bajo Grande, Bolivar and San Francisco, Antioquia, required more than twice the initially planned time to clear, and the market for returning IDPs has not yet been adequately developed. In Bajo Grande, Bolivar, and San Francisco, Antioquia, the ICRC substantially expanded its focus on weapons-contamination issues in 2007. It seeks to provide a multidisciplinary response to the needs of affected communities and victims in terms of data gathering, victim assistance, and preventive activities. The focus of the ICRC’s work is a mixture of direct-action intervention, support to the Colombian Red Cross weapons-contamination activities, and advocacy to government institutions.

The article will summarize key aspects of the weapons-contamination situation in Colombia, and outline the ICRC and CRC movement response.

The Weapons-contamination Context

Edmund Trinakaran has worked for the past five years as a Humanitarian Mine-action Program Manager in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs’ Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, U.S. Department of State. Before this position, he managed the ICRC’s foreign military sales and a Program Analyst at Armstrong Laboratories at Wright Patterson Air Force Base for 15 years. He has an MBA in finance and health administration and currently resides in northern Virginia with his wife and two children.

Edmund Trinakaran
Program Manager
Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement
Bureau of Political-Military Affairs
U.S. Department of State
555 12th Street S.W.
1212 Virginia Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20523
Tel: +1 202 663 0141
Fax: +1 202 663 0500
E-mail: trinakaran@state.gov
Web site: http://www.state.gov

The International Committee of the Red Cross has been working alongside the Colombian Red Cross to ease Colombia’s weapons-contamination problem, made more difficult by ongoing conflict. By combining preventive measures, victim assistance, rehabilitation programs and economic aid, the ICRC has strengthened Colombian organizations, while educating the public and assisting those negatively affected by explosive remnants of war.

The efforts of the ICRC have significantly helped Colombia where many other international organizations had found it difficult to assist because of the current political situation.

by Andy Wheatley | International Committee of the Red Cross