

# MAG Involvement with SA/LW

In less than 20 years, Mines Advisory Group, involved in the identification and destruction of small arms/light weapons, has made a real impact. Maintaining technical support at hand-in points, offering capacity-building training and conducting assessments of stockpile management are just a few of the services MAG provides.

by Steve Priestley [ Mines Advisory Group ]

**M**ines Advisory Group first became involved in destruction of small arms/light weapons during the 1990s. United Nations peacekeeping troops in Angola and Cambodia were overseeing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration<sup>1</sup> projects, as well as collecting weapons and ammunition. As MAG had trained demining teams in areas where the activity was taking place, the troops sought its advice and support, which involved verifying the safety of weapons, weapons systems and ammunition that had been handed in, and conducting their subsequent destruction.

In 2001, large abandoned stockpiles of ammunition were identified in southern Sudan. Reports from local communities confirmed that weapons and ammunition were being stolen and trafficked across the adjoining Congolese and Ugandan borders, and that the stockpiles posed a threat to the communities if they exploded. Due to the high number of trafficked stockpiles located during a formal survey of central Equatoria, MAG secured specific funding for their destruction from the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs' Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State.

## Present Activities

In early 2006, during mine- and unexploded ordnance-clearance activities in Equateur province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, MAG identified large stockpiles of weapons and ammunition that had been handed in during DDR activities, or were surplus to army and police requirements. The stockpiles were poorly maintained and insecure. Coordination with the United Nations Organization Mission in the DRC and the United Nations Development Programme led to the discovery that further stockpiles were located throughout the country.

This knowledge of existing stockpiles prompted MAG to establish its first large-scale weapons-destruction project. The project involves centralized destruction of SA/LW at the Congolese Army's Central Logistics Base in Kinshasa using hydraulic shears. Following destruction of surplus weapons stored at the base, surplus stocks from outlying military regions are now being shipped to Kinshasa for destruction. The

workshop is operated by soldiers from the Army's Logistics Brigade, who have received training from MAG. A MAG technician supports management of the operation and also conducts quality-assurance activities on the team.

In addition to operations in Kinshasa, mobile teams conduct inspection and destruction of surplus or unsafe ammunition throughout the military regions in the DRC. The implementation plan has been developed in conjunction with army commanders, and complete stockpile destruction in the DRC is anticipated by the end of 2010.

Significant progress has been made in ridding the DRC of its surplus stockpiles. Between May 2007 and October 2008, gun-destruction activities demolished 81,745 weapons and 288 tonnes (317 U.S. tons) of ammunition.

Projects were established in Burundi and the Republic of Congo during 2007 supporting the destruction of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS), surplus weapons and unsafe ammunition, as well as promoting stockpile-management training and physical security improvements. More than 400 MANPADS of various types (mainly SAM-7b and SA-16<sup>2</sup>) and 5,000 weapons have been destroyed. Both countries have expanded their projects; they now receive funds from multiple donors and offer support to police and army activities.



Weapon destruction at the Central Logistics Base, Kinshasa, DRC.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF MAG-DRC



SAM-7b MANPADS awaiting destruction, Burundi.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF MAG-BURUNDI

In Burundi, MAG's support to Dutch-government-led security-sector reforms includes surveying all police facilities nationwide where weapons are stored to identify the type and number of surplus or seized weapons requiring destruction, determining necessary improvements in physical security, and discovering training needs of the police armories. The survey was completed in the southern region of Burundi in January 2009, which complemented surveys conducted in the western and northern regions in February. The surveys revealed that there is an overabundance of SA/LW, insufficient security at the armories and a lack of proper training for the armory workers.<sup>3</sup> Phase two of the survey, consisting of destruction of SA/LW, security improvements and increased training, will be implemented between March 2009 and April 2010. This deadline will ensure that security improves before the general elections take place in 2010.<sup>4</sup>

MAG projects in Iraq, Somalia and Sudan focus on the destruction of unsecured, abandoned stockpiles rather than weapons, due to the significant internal and regional security threats these munitions pose. With donor agreement, MAG takes a holistic approach to this clearance work and destroys items that fall outside the SA/LW category but still pose a security threat (such as artillery projectiles).

Many of MAG's SA/LW activities take place in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa, and through the course of coordinating and planning activities, MAG became aware of the Regional Centre for Small Arms and Light Weapons based in Nairobi, Kenya (RECSA). The centre is an institutional framework formed because of the Nairobi Declaration.<sup>5</sup> Its goal is to prevent and obliterate the stockpiling and illicit trafficking of SA/LW in the Great Lakes Region and Horn of Africa by coordinating the efforts of member states. Following initial contacts and discussions during 2007, MAG signed a Memorandum of Understanding with RECSA at the beginning of 2008 to provide technical advice and support to RECSA and its member states. Future plans, from mid-2009 onward, will focus on capacity-building and technical skills transfer.

In November 2008, MAG established its newest SA/LW project with the help of British government funding. A MAG central destruction workshop is being set up in Kigali, Rwanda to carry out destruction of surplus, expired or unstable munitions weapons identified by the government.

## The Future

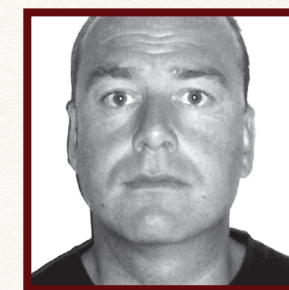
MAG will contribute to the International Small Arms Control Standards currently being developed by the U.N. Coordinating Action on Small Arms, taking into account the realities found on the ground and the levels of support and training required in many of the countries where it has operated to date.

MAG continues to seek new opportunities with countries, institutions and organizations that require technical support. It provides the following SA/LW remediation and stockpile-management activities globally:

- Giving technical support at weapon hand-in points to ensure and maintain safety during demobilization activities
- Implementing destruction of SA/LW and associated ammunition to international standards, frequently in challenging operational environments
- Providing capacity-building training to ensure sustainable in-country technical expertise is established and maintained in relation to destruction, correct storage and security of retained stockpiles
- Conducting assessments of stockpile management, as well as identifying and implementing improvements to ensure storage is, as far as realistically possible, in line with international standards for security and safety

MAG is implementing SA/LW remediation projects in Burundi, DRC, Iraq, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia (Puntland) and Sudan. ♦

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