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Nicaragua

by Jessica Jacklin [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]



Nicaragua is located in Central America, midway between Mexico and Colombia, bordered by Honduras to the north, Costa Rica to the south, the Caribbean Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the southwest. It was granted independence from Spain in 1821 and ultimately became an independent republic seven years later. In 1979, a civil war broke out that lasted 11 years, littering the country with landmines and unexploded ordnance that remain to this day. When Hurricane Mitch struck Nicaragua in October 1998, it exacerbated the landmine problem by moving remnants from the internal conflict, making clearance extremely challenging. In recent years, though, Nicaragua has made significant progress.

Landmine/UXO Overview

The government of Nicaragua, via military resources, initiated the first landmine clearance operations in 1989. Nicaragua currently registers 97-percent completion based on the number of areas to be cleared; however, unrecorded mines are continually being discovered, and every year since 2004, projected completion of mine clearance has been pushed back. In March 2008 the deadline was extended over a year, pushing it back to 1 May 2009. Northern regions of the country continue to be the most affected. Of those areas still not deemed "mine free," the municipalities of Jinotega and Nueva Segovia are the most in need of assistance. Within Nicaragua, 13 of the 15 departments contained landmines in 1990. This included 105 communities populated with 111,000 people who lived near a minefield. Since 1990, the total number of people who live near a landmine has decreased by 90 percent.¹ As of June 2008, at least 14,584 mines remained across eight municipalities, including the departments of Nuevo Segovia, Jinotega, Matagalpa and the South Atlantic Autonomous Region. The area along the Costa Rica border is considered mine free.²

Casualties

The Organization of American States reports 1,220 landmine and UXO casualties in Nicaragua as of 2008. Of this total, 41 casualties were deminers, with the vast majority of incidents occurring during the country's early years of demining. Between 1998 and 2002, Nicaragua registered an average of 13 casualties per year from landmines, compared to the next four years when the number of casualties decreased an average of two per year. Victim assistance has provided physical rehabilitation to landmine survivors who require support, and in recent years, 40 percent of these survivors were assisted with social reintegration.¹

Demining

The *Cómisión Nacional de Desminado*, established by law in 1988, is key in every effort related to mine action and is responsible for formulating the national mine-action program, *Programa Nacional de Desminado Humanitario*.² The Nicaraguan Army is highly involved at an operational level with Army Engineer Corps personnel. They work alongside civilians in small demining units, which have declined in size from about 600 to 500 total deminers due to a recent lack of funding, the exception being the independent group of 29 Nicaraguans making up the Marking Platoon. The OAS is responsible for coordinating and supervising the Program of Assistance for Demining in Central America, while the Inter-American Defense Board provides supervision and the *Misión de Asistencia para la Remoción de Minas en Centro América* provides technical support.

Mine-risk Education

During 2007, MRE activities reached 140 communities within five departments, directly affecting 42,000 people. According to the OAS, this effort will most likely continue into 2010. There has been an overall trend, however, of decreased coverage in the past two years, evidenced by a 40-percent decrease of risk education in 2007. Carlos Orozco, National Coordinator of the OAS Mine Action Program in Nicaragua, adds, "The decreased level of incidents and changes in the behaviors of communities affected has proven [the OAS's] efforts successful; however, a particular challenge is to continue the MRE efforts beyond when the National Demining Plan is finished."¹ Thus, UXO remains an important challenge in Nicaragua. According to Orzoco, in 2007, OAS mine-awareness campaigning received 171 reports from communities concerning the presence of 56 mines and 4,259 pieces of UXO.¹

Reality Check

Demining efforts are ongoing with continued help from the international community in identifying resources that may enable Nicaragua to finish clearance by the May 2009 deadline. However, the lack of funds is a relevant issue that might pose a risk for the finalization of ongoing demining efforts. According to Orozco, "The hope is to have all of Nicaragua mine-impact free in the year 2010."¹ 🇳🇮

Biography



Jessica Jacklin joined the *Journal of ERW and Mine Action* team as an Editorial Assistant in 2008. She is from Annapolis, Maryland, and graduated from JMU in May 2009 with a Bachelor of Business Administration in business marketing concentrating in European business and a minor in studio art.

Endnotes

1. E-mail interview with Carlos Orozco, Regional Coordinator for Central America, OAS–AICMA program. 5 October 2008.
2. "Nicaragua" *Landmine Monitor Report* 2008. <http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2008/countries/nicaragua.html>. Accessed 15 April 2009.

Contact Information

Jessica Jacklin
 Editorial Assistant
The Journal of ERW and Mine Action
 Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
 E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

Carlos J. Orozco
 Regional Coordinator for Central America
 AICMA
 Organization of American States
 De la Iglesia El Carmen 1 c y media Abajo
 Frente a la Embajada de France
 Managua / Nicaragua

Tel: +505 2266 1251
E-mail: corozco@oas.org
Web site: <http://www.aicma.oas.org>



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