Venezuela

Country Profile

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Financial Concerns

Peru's lack of funding for mine-action projects impedes the progress of mine clearance. Its 10-year extension request included an estimated cost for all clearance procedures between 2009 and 2019, but Peru worried that national and international funds would not provide the required cost of these operations. Peru and Ecuador worked to obtain financial and technical funds during a series of meetings in 2007 with international donors to address these needs. The lack of mine-risk education due to a shortage of funds is part of the overall limitations Peru has in managing the country's landmines/unexploded ordnance crisis. Victim assistance in Peru has also been affected by a lack of funds, with comprehensive medical assistance limited in rural areas. Community-based rehabilitation services exist in Lima, but, due to a lack of funding, the program has been unable to expand to other parts of the country.

Geographic Obstacles

Geographic obstacles where the majority of the landmine problems are located restrict the program’s ability to reach its deadlines.

Peru contains mountain and jungle regions, both of which provide conditions that make it difficult for demining. Irregular mountain terrain such as peaks and gorges, as well as a lack of oxygen at high altitudes, make de-mining difficult. Similarly, conditions such as heavy precipitation and dense vegetation hinder mine clearance in Peru's jungle regions, including along its border with Ecuador.

Looking Forward

Peru has suffered from inadequate MRE and victim assistance programs, due in no small part to a lack of funding. Despite the country's inadequate resources, some organizations, including the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, still question why Peru has taken so long to clear its remaining landmines. The extension granted to Peru at the ninth meeting of the States Parties in November 2008 was done in light of its commitment to more consistent demining and the projected socioeconomic benefits. Hopefully, this investment will pay off and give Peru a future free from the plight of landmines. See Endnotes, Page 314

Lebanese Deminer’s Stories Told in Documentary

Remnants of War, a feature-length documentary about the post-war environment in Lebanon, was recently shown at the 20th annual Human Rights Watch Film Festival. The film was the first feature-length documentary by director Jawad Metni, an Arab-American filmmaker of Lebanese descent who grew up in Texas. Metni’s film was chosen from about 500 films submitted for the festival. Only 23 feature-length films and 11 shorts were screened at this year’s festival.

Metni, who still has family in Lebanon, felt helpless as he watched the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah unfold while living in New York. Close to one million cluster munitions were dropped on Lebanon by Israel in the conflict, and it is estimated that 30 percent of these munitions failed to detonate. The munitions posed an immediate danger to the Lebanese people and continued to present difficulties to civilians in the area. The conflict spurred Metni to move to Lebanon to work for seven months in 2007, filming the lives of deminers in South Lebanon. Working with a shoestring budget, most of which was used for living expenses, Remnants of War is a vivid record of man’s inhumanity to man. The film showcases the deminers themselves, allowing them to speak about their lives, hopes and fears for the future of their country.

The Human Rights Watch Film Festival is a program of Human Rights Watch, a group that highlights human rights violations around the world. Coordinators at the festival noted that each year's participants are more professional and sophisticated, with high production values and musical scores. Films are chosen, however, based on their ability to present the issues at hand.

Venezuela

Since October 1999, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been a State Party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which it signed 3 December 1997, and ratified 14 April 1999. Upon ratification of the convention, the document became a national law of Venezuela. At the U.N. Conference on Disarmament in 2006, Venezuela announced that it had fulfilled its duties to the Convention in 2003, destroying 47,189 AP mines and keeping 5,000 landmines for military training. The country also announced that it had enacted the Disarmament Act in 2003, which seeks to eliminate the illegal possession of small arms/light weapons from the public sector.

Despite complying with certain aspects of the Ottawa Convention by ratifying it and meeting deadlines for stockpile destruction, the Venezuelan military continues to violate the Convention by using landmines around several military bases. Venezuela laid 1,074 AP mines from 1993–97, surrounding six of its naval bases on the border shared with Colombia. Venezuela responds that it is “fully committed to the objectives and spirit of the Ottawa Convention.” However, Venezuela disagrees with the Convention openly stated in its 2007 Article 7 Report that it continues “making active use of these emplaced antipersonnel mines.” Furthermore, Venezuela says that it may need to have its deadline for mine clearance extended.

Venezuela cites threats from Colombian guerrilla forces, stating that until its country develops an early-detection warning system to use in their placement, the mines will continue to be utilized for this purpose. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines stands in opposition to this military usage, officially stating that Venezuela has “in essence said that it is purposefully deploying AP mines in order to derive military benefits from them, and in doing so, as required by the treaty, to clear them as soon as possible, or possibly even by the 10-year deadline.” However, Venezuela isDéjà vu all over again. The same scenarios are being repeated, as required by the treaty, to clear them as soon as possible, or possibly even by the 10-year deadline. As a result, the Convention and its signatories are committed to the objectives and spirit of the Ottawa Convention.

Mine Action

Within Venezuela, there is no existing national mine-action authority and therefore no national mine-action center to oversee mine-related activities. Rather, since 2004, Rear Admiral Alcibides Jesus Paz has held a post that places him in charge of mine-clearance train-

Casualties

In recent years, there have only been two mine-related casualties—both of them incidents involving the military. The most recent occurrence took place in 2004, and before that, in 1996, although it was not disclosed for seven years. In 2007, the Venezuelan government finally revealed the facts of the 1996 mine-casualty event, which took place at the naval base in the Rio Arauca International in Apure state. No casualties from landmine-related incidents have been reported in the last four years within Venezuela.

Survivor Assistance

Venezuela’s Article 7 report does not include information on provisions for landmine survivors. The Convention recognizes that, while providing survivors assistance to the victims of the 1996 and 2004 military mine incidents. The victim from the incident in 1996 received medical aid and psychological assistance. The incident occurred when a soldier was electrocuting a weapon by desconing the victim of the 2004 incident, who was told to go into the minefield by a commander. Meanwhile, the commander who gave the order has received disciplinary action, and the victim of the incident released by the Convention.

Venezuela has a national health-care system in place that includes “specialized services” in urban hospital locations. Rehabilitation services are one of these services available. Venezuela is not a signatory to the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but it does have national laws that protect disabled persons from discrimination.

Conclusion

Venezuela is a State Party of the Ottawa Convention, and while it has complied with some of its precepts, it continues to violate the tenants of the convention by refusing to remove the landmines laid for defensive purposes around its naval bases bordering Colombia. There is a high level of drug-related violence along the border, sparking some form of an early-alert system for the nation. However, there are other early alert systems that can be used in place of landmines. Furthermore, Venezuela has requested its original 2006 Article 5 deadline be extended to 2014. Even if the Convention is ultimately violated by Venezuela, the nation has committed to continue to demine and violate the convention.