

Chechnya

by Kateland Shane [Mine Action Information Center]



Graphic courtesy of MAIC

For the past 10 years, a violent conflict between the Russian military and Chechen rebels has resulted in accusations of kidnapping, rape, looting and other atrocities from both sides. Instances of violence constantly plague the Chechen population, including accidents involving unexploded ordnance and landmines.

UXO and Mines

During the 1994–1996 conflict and the 1999 resurgence of fighting, Russia used both ground- and air-launched cluster munitions against Chechnya. Two of the most serious incidents involved air strikes on the town of Shali and the capital, Grozny.¹ About 15 percent of munitions dropped in Chechnya failed to explode, resulting in heavy UXO contamination.² According to the *2005 Global Impact Survey*, estimates of the UXO/mine contamination "suggest that Chechnya is highly contaminated, with UXO forming a very significant part of the total problem."³ From December 1994 to July 2006, UNICEF registered 835 UXO victims, with the majority of incidents occurring in the Groznenskiy district.⁴

Since the beginning of the conflict in 1994, both the Russian military and Chechen rebels have used landmines. Although Russia has not emplaced mines recently, reports indicate the country used anti-personnel mines extensively in 1999 and 2000. Rebels have used mines more recently in Chechnya as a tactic of guerrilla warfare. They also reportedly engaged civilian adults and children in the practice by using such extreme methods as blackmail and threats.⁵ Due to its small size and population, Chechnya is one of the most mine-affected areas in the world.²

In December 2004, the Russian Federation ratified Protocol II, "Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices" of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.⁶ The Russian Federation has not yet ratified the Ottawa Convention.⁷ Steps are being taken to engage non-state actors such as armed or rebel groups in Chechnya in the Geneva Call Deed of Commitment⁸; however, none have yet signed this agreement.

UXO and Mine Clearance

Although no large-scale clearance operations have been conducted in Chechnya, some organizations have been involved in small-scale clearance projects. From April to May 2005, the Emergency Committee (EMERCOM) of Russia was involved in a mine and UXO clearance project near the Stariye Atagi village.

During the short operation, EMERCOM cleared 61 hectares (150 acres) of land and located and disposed of 3,845 pieces of UXO.⁹

UXO and Mine Awareness

UNICEF. Since 2000, UNICEF has been working with other organizations to bring mine and UXO awareness to the northern Caucasus region. UNICEF has successfully trained 30 mine-risk education instructors from two local organizations—Voice of the Mountains and Let's Save the Generation—and the international non-governmental organization Danish Demining Group. UNICEF has also brought mine-risk education into secondary schools with an MRE curriculum. A total of 425 teachers from secondary schools in Chechnya have been trained to deliver a mine-risk education school course designed by UNICEF in 2001.¹⁰ UNICEF has organized community-based MRE projects in the form of dramatic performances and presentations through Voice of the Mountains.⁴ UNICEF has also established 31 leisure centers for children living in the most affected places.¹⁰ In 2005, UNICEF and Voice of the Mountains finished the formation of 10 mine focus groups in several districts of Chechnya. The groups have earned full government support with their promise to help reduce the impact of mines and UXO in the future.⁵

ICRC. The International Committee of the Red Cross MRE program in Chechnya has helped many people, particularly children, learn about the risks of mines and UXO. "Cheerdig" is a familiar cartoon boy in Chechnya who teaches MRE through appearances in TV programs, puppet shows and *Raduga*, a children's magazine. In 2004–2005, the ICRC introduced the "Danger Mines" murals project to 30 Chechen schools. The project involved students creating murals about the threats of mines and UXO to hang on the walls of their schools. Since 2004, the ICRC has also been involved in the creation of play areas where children and teens can participate safely in outdoor activities. The ICRC reaches adults in Chechnya with mass media such as video clips, posters and leaflets. It has also conducted MRE trainings for community figures such as teachers, journalists and local authorities.¹¹

DDG. Danish Demining Group has reached both adults and children in Chechnya with its mass-media campaigns and community- and school-based MRE projects. Three DDG teams of instructors have visited various institutions in Chechnya, delivering presentations and distributing educational materials. DDG has been involved in the successful training of Chechen librarians and teachers in the area of MRE. At the community level, DDG has been involved in the creation of safe play areas, and last year it created 20 new areas. DDG has also hosted MRE festivals in which more than 100 schools took part. The festivals are designed to draw community attention to the problem of mines and UXO.¹²

A Safer Future

Although the conflict rages on, there is hope for a brighter future in Chechnya. Several mine- and UXO-awareness projects are already operating in the northern Caucasus region, and mine/UXO casualties appear to be decreasing in Chechnya.⁵ Both local and international humanitarian organizations are working on strengthening their programs with the common vision of rendering Chechnya safe from the impact of mines and UXO.

Biography

Kateland Shane has worked as an Editorial Assistant for the *Journal of Mine Action* since May 2006. She is currently pursuing an undergraduate bachelor's degree in technical and scientific communication at James Madison University. After graduating in 2007, she plans to return to JMU for graduate school.



Endnotes

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