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Kosovo

by Kateland Shane [Mine Action Information Center]



Graphic courtesy of MAIC

From 1998 to 1999, an internal struggle known as the Kosovo Conflict caused Kosovo, a U.N.-administered province of Serbia, to become littered with mines and unexploded ordnance, including cluster-bomb units. Since the conflict ended, mines and UXO have claimed hundreds of victims in Kosovo. Today, very little of the original contamination remains thanks to the success of Kosovo's excellent mine-action program.

Background

The Kosovo Conflict occurred between the Kosovo Liberation Army and the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. On March 24, 1999, NATO launched *Operation Allied Force*, a 78-day bombing campaign against the FRY,¹ in which 1,300 cluster munitions were dropped in Kosovo.² Although the campaign was successful in causing the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian troops from Kosovo territory, air strikes left Kosovo contaminated with unexploded CBUs.

During the conflict, both sides emplaced landmines, oftentimes around residential areas.³ In June 1999, 620 minefields were discovered in Kosovo. In addition, Kosovo is heavily polluted with UXO—including mortars, grenades, projectiles and missiles²—from the conflict and continuing civil strife between Serbian and ethnic Albanian populations.¹ By the end of the conflict, 4,520 "dangerous areas"⁴ existed in Kosovo.²

Although all known minefields were reported cleared in 2001, no records exist and minefields continue to be discovered.⁵ Submunition sites can also be difficult to reach since they are mostly found in densely wooded and remote areas.¹ Since the conflict, there have been 111 people killed and 418 people injured in Kosovo from mines and UXO. From January to May 2006, nine civilian casualties occurred as a result of UXO, with one reported death. However, while some accidents still occur, the contamination does not generally limit mobility or socioeconomic development in Kosovo.² Accident statistics indicate the threat from CBUs and landmines is very low and that the remaining threat is from UXO, mostly hand grenades that can be difficult to locate and clear.²

Since Kosovo is a province of Serbia and not a sovereign state, it cannot sign legislation concerning mines and weapons on its own. However, Serbia is a State Party to both the Ottawa Convention⁶ and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (Protocols II, III and IV).⁷

Mine Action in Kosovo

The mine-action program in Kosovo has been hailed as very successful for completing the clearance of Kosovo in a period of just three years. In 1999, the United Nations entered Kosovo and set up the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Centre, which was responsible for coordinating mine-action activities for two years in the province. UNMACC has since closed operations, but Kosovo itself remains under U.N. administration under the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, as it has been since June 1999.² In December 2001, the Office of the Kosovo Protection Corps Coordinator took over responsibility of all mine-action and explosive-ordnance-disposal activities. The EOD Management Section of the KPC is responsible for managing survey and clearance activities in Kosovo.⁸

Mine/UXO clearance. Most of the clearance work in Kosovo has already been completed, although some dangerous areas remain. From 1999 to 2001, UNMACC cleared all known minefields and surface-cleared all known cluster-munition-strike sites in Kosovo.⁵ Since 1999, a total of 43,363,485 square meters (10,715 acres) of land has been cleared of mines and UXO, and 19,062 CBUs have been located and destroyed (as of August 25, 2006). From January to August 2006, the Kosovo Protection Corps and international nongovernmental organizations HALO Trust and Mines Awareness Trust have cleared 1,891,244 square meters (467 acres) of land and located and destroyed 1,838 pieces of UXO. Only 15 dangerous areas remain to be cleared of mines/UXO and an additional 45 low-priority tasks need sub-surface clearance. Challenges for clearance in Kosovo include lack of funding and contamination in remote, hard-to-reach areas.²

Mine/UXO awareness. The Explosive Ordnance Disposal Management Section of the Office of the Kosovo Protection Corps Coordinator manages all mine- and UXO-awareness activities in Kosovo. Other organizations working to conduct mine and UXO awareness in Kosovo include the Kosovo Stabilization Force; the Red Cross of Kosovo; the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; the National Institute of Public Health; and Mines Awareness Trust.² Authorities have found the best way to reach the public is through media campaigns developed for print, television and radio. Advertisements show pictures of mines and UXO and instruct people in three languages on what to do if they come across mines or UXO. Their main message is, "Don't touch anything suspicious!" and they also encourage civilians to report sightings of mines and UXO to the proper authorities.⁸

Conclusion

Since 1999, Kosovo has been rendered almost completely free of the mines and UXO that remained from the Kosovo Conflict. The threat is now viewed as a very limited problem that does not strongly impact the development or way of life in Kosovo.² The vision of the EOD Management Section is to become a national mine-action authority as soon as the constitutional status of Kosovo is decided.⁹

Biography



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

Endnotes

1. "Explosive Remnants of War and Mines Other Than Anti-personnel Mines." *Global Impact Survey 2004-2005*. Landmine Action, March 2005. pp. 98-100.
http://www.minesactioncanada.org/files/Global_impact_survey.pdf. Accessed August 28, 2006.
2. E-mail correspondence with Ahmet Sallova, Head of EOD Management Section, Office of the KPC Coordinator. September 4, 2006.

3. Meador, Alexandra. "Kosovo." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 9.1, August 2005. pp. 78–79. <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr/journal/9.1/Profiles/kosovo.htm>. Accessed September 5, 2006.
4. A dangerous area is an area not in productive use due to perceived or actual presence of mines, UXO or other explosive devices.
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