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[Contents](#) | [Editorials](#) | [Focus](#) | [Feature](#) | [Making it Personal](#) | [Heroes](#)
[Notes from the Field](#) | [Profiles](#) | [Research and Development](#) | [JMA](#) |

Democratic Republic of the Congo

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By: **Megan Wertz [Mine Action Information Center]**

The landmine and explosive remnants of war problem in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been a result of armed conflict since 1996. The contamination "extends diagonally from the northwest corner of Equateur province across the center of [the] country through Kasai to the southeast in Katanga province and then north along Lake Tanganyika up to Ituri district along the border with Uganda."¹ The extent of the contamination, however, remains unknown because acquiring information on mine contamination in the DRC has been difficult due to some areas being isolated by the threat from explosive remnants of war.

The DRC acceded to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention² May 2, 2002, and it took effect Nov. 1, 2002. The DRC is not known to have produced or exported anti-personnel mines. Both the government and rebels have obtained mines from a variety of sources. An arms embargo was imposed in July 2003 by the U.N. Security Council on the Ituri district and the provinces of North and South Kivu. The DRC's convention-mandated deadline for destroying its AP mine stockpile is Nov. 1, 2006.

Landmine Problem

In June 2005, 828 dangerous areas were registered by the U.N. Mine Action Coordination Center. Of the registered areas, 815 are suspected to be mined and 213 contain unexploded ordnance. The two most affected provinces are Katanga, with 290 suspected dangerous areas, and Equateur, which has 93.



The total number of mine/UXO casualties in the DRC is unknown. According to the U.N. Mission in the DRC, there have been approximately 2,585 mine casualties recorded.¹ The majority of

recorded casualties occurred in Equateur, South Kivu, Katanga, North Kivu and Oriental provinces. The impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war on the population is difficult to determine due to the isolation of areas in the southeast for the past three years, mainly due to the ERW threat. Nongovernmental organizations have experienced difficulties when attempting to access remote areas of the DRC. The large size of the country, inaccessibility of areas due to natural conditions (e.g., vegetation and abundant rainfall), and unstable safety conditions have inhibited survey activity.

Mine-action Program

On May 6, 2002, the National Commission to Fight Anti-personnel Mines was established to coordinate mine action at the governmental level, develop a mine-action plan, write Article-7 transparency reports, promote the Mine Ban Convention, mobilize international assistance and expertise, and educate the public on the danger of landmines. The U.N. Mine Action Coordination Center has had *de facto* responsibility for planning, managing and overseeing mine-action activities. The UNMACC also carries out all emergency operations in support of the U.N. Mission in the DRC.

Mines Advisory Group. MAG began demining operations in the DRC in July 2004, with a national office in Lubumbashi, Katanga province, and a liaison office in Kinshasa. MAG began operating a rapid-deployment international mine-action team and by June 2005, it had carried out three high-priority tasks in Ikela, Bolomba and Gbadolite. Also by June, MAG had two 13-person mine-action teams and one four-person community-liaison team in the DRC. From March to July 2005, MAG teams destroyed over 8,750 pieces of UXO, clearing over 9,500 square meters (two acres) of land. MAG focuses on creating safe access to agricultural land, water sources, medical care and education facilities. Since January 2005, MAG has integrated mine-risk education through its community liaison team in Petwo.

Handicap International. The HI program in the DRC began in 2001 in Kisangani and consists of four parts: impact analysis, community support, survivor assistance and MINEX (mine clearance, explosive ordnance disposal, marking and stockpile destruction). HI implements mine-risk education through educational and interactive sessions in Kisangani and within a 122-kilometer (76-mile) radius. MRE is also distributed via leaflets, posters, educational signboards and TV spots.

Survivor Assistance

The armed conflict in the DRC has had a detrimental impact on the country's health-care system. Hospitals, medical centers and health posts have been destroyed, and there is a lack of medical and paramedical personnel, equipment and medicines. According to the *Landmine Monitor Report*, some health workers have not received a state salary for over a decade. The cost of medicines and health care is too high for many Congolese and the remaining referral hospitals are often far from mine-affected areas. The DRC has no specific legislation for mine survivors, but acknowledges its obligations under the Mine Ban Convention to provide assistance and seeks legal advice to draft survivor-assistance legislation.

The International Committee for the Red Cross, in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of the DRC, assists hospitals and health centers by providing surgical instruments and supplies, equipment and medicines. The ICRC has also conducted a two-month training session for local surgeons on operating techniques for war injuries. In 2004, the ICRC also created easy access for people with war-related disabilities to the *Centre de Réadaptation pour Handicapée Physique*, Kalembe-Lembe Physical Rehabilitation Center and Saint Jean-Baptiste Hospital. The ICRC then

supplied the three centers with materials and reimbursed the costs of assessment, prostheses and orthoses, and physiotherapy services for about 500 war-injured people.

A Tight Deadline

Without the data a survey can provide, the DRC is unable to design a national mine-action strategy. Therefore, it is very unlikely the DRC will be able to meet its Nov. 1, 2006, deadline for stockpile destruction. Once a national strategy is in place, and with continued support from the United Nations and organizations like MAG and HI, the DRC will be well on its way to alleviating the landmine problem.

Biography

Megan Wertz has worked for the *Journal of Mine Action* since August 2005. She graduated in May 2006 from James Madison University with a Bachelor of Science in technical and scientific communication. Wertz will attend The George Washington University in the fall to obtain a Master of Arts in public policy and hopes to pursue a career in environmental policy.



Endnotes

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2. "Democratic Republic of Congo." Handicap International. http://www.handicap-international.org.uk/page_373.php. Accessed April 3, 2006.
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