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Senegal

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By: Megan Wertz [Mine Action Information Center]

Landmine contamination in Senegal can be found in almost all the villages between the Casamance River and the border with Guinea-Bissau, and along the border with The Gambia. The contamination stems primarily from fighting in the Casamance region since 1982 between the Senegalese Army and the *Mouvement des Forces Democratiques de Casamance*, especially since 1997. The area south of Casamance between the Casamance River and the Guinea-Bissau border is the most affected region. The extent of the contamination is unclear without the Landmine Impact Survey, but according to the *Landmine Monitor Report*, about 1,400 square kilometers (541 square miles) of land are mine-affected.

Senegal became a State Party to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention¹ in March 1999. In December 2004, the parties to the conflict in Casamance reached a peace agreement calling for immediate humanitarian demining in Casamance. A law against landmines was adopted by the National Assembly in August 2005 and forms the policy implementing the Mine Ban Convention.

Landmine Problem

Mine contamination in Senegal has a negative impact on the economic development of Casamance. Contamination has affected agriculture, fishing and the transport of goods and services. Trade between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau and the resettlement of the population displaced by the conflict have also been interrupted by the landmine problem. According to Albéric Kacou, U.N. Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident

Representative, hundreds of villages have been abandoned, causing the displacement of



(click on thumbnail to see larger image in new window)

thousands of people. The tourist industry fired thousands of workers, and schools and health centers have closed due to the threat of landmines.

Handicap International–France maintains a database of landmine casualties, which has recorded 679 victims since 1997, the majority being women and children. According to Kacou, this casualty data may not reflect the true number of casualties because burials take place as soon as possible after a death and there is an absence of death registries in the area.

Mine-action Program

The law adopted by the National Assembly in 2005 calls for an inter-ministerial commission to be established to ensure implementation of the Convention and supervise a mine-action center that will be established in Ziguinchor. The Senegalese government requested assistance from the United Nations Development Programme to help develop a mine-action program; a UNDP mission was established in Senegal in 2005. The UNDP partnered with the Canadian International Development Agency to implement the Landmine Impact Survey, and it was completed in May 2006. The UNDP has included Senegal in its Completion Initiative plans and hopes high- and medium-priority areas will be cleared by 2009, the Convention-mandated deadline.

Mine-risk Education

MRE and victim-assistance activities have been undertaken for several years in the Casamance region by UNICEF and Handicap International. These activities have most likely played a large role in the decrease of mine victims figures in the region for the past few years: 17 victims in 2004 compared to 198 in 1998, during a time when no humanitarian mine clearance occurred.

HI has worked with the regional education department to insert MRE into the curriculum; 1,400 teachers were trained and 70,000 students were exposed to MRE by the end of 2004. HI also works with community-level volunteers trained in MRE. In 15 communities, volunteers are part of a larger mine committee, which includes the village chief or other respected resource persons. The committees' tasks include MRE and marking minefields with locally appropriate signs. MRE tools include image boxes, mine folders, posters and banners. MRE messages are transmitted twice a week through two radio stations in Ziguinchor and once a week on one station in Kolda.

Survivor Assistance

Senegal's objectives for victim assistance for 2005–2009 include establishing a centralized network for data collection and management, equipping ambulances to respond to emergencies, setting up blood banks, enhancing medical training and upgrading equipment in orthopedic centers. The Ziguinchor regional hospital is the best-equipped institution in the mine-affected area, but it generally takes eight hours to reach the hospital; sometimes it can take as long as 36 hours.

Prosthetics and rehabilitation services are available in Ziguinchor and at the *Centre d'Appareillage orthopédique* in Dakar, the capital of Senegal. In Ziguinchor, the regional hospital has an orthopedic department with facilities for surgery, rehabilitation, an orthopedic workshop and a mobile orthopedic workshop. The *Centre d'Appareillage orthopédique* has a team of two physiotherapists and four orthopedic technicians.

HI operates the program for Prevention of Mine Accidents Assisting People with Disabilities, Mines Victims or Others in Casamance. The focus of the program is socioeconomic rehabilitation of landmine survivors and persons with disabilities. HI also supports the ongoing training of

orthopedic technicians and physiotherapists. The Senegalese Association of Mine Action works to empower mine survivors and their families to aid social and economic reintegration. The Association organizes activities like a day of action and seminar to raise awareness of the mine problem as well as the needs of mine survivors and the families of those killed.

A Mine-safe Senegal

Even though a mine-clearance capacity is not fully established in Senegal, the country has made a huge impact on the landmine situation just through mine-risk education and awareness. Landmine contamination is believed to be modest and confined to certain areas. The Senegalese government, with UNDP assistance, "is determined to adopt a strategy which will ensure that Casamance will be 'mine impact' free for 2009."² The determination of the government, completion of the LIS, and quick establishment of a mine-action center should allow Senegal to meet its deadlines.

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

1. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*, Oslo, Norway. 18 Sept. 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed 26 April 2006. The document was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, 3 Dec. 1997, and thus is commonly known as the Ottawa Convention.
2. E-mail interview. Albéric Kacou, U.N. Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative. March 24, 2006.

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1. "Senegal." *Landmine Monitor Report 2005: Towards a Mine-Free World*. New York: International Campaign to Ban Landmines. 2005. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2005/senegal>. Accessed March 29, 2006.

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