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Uganda

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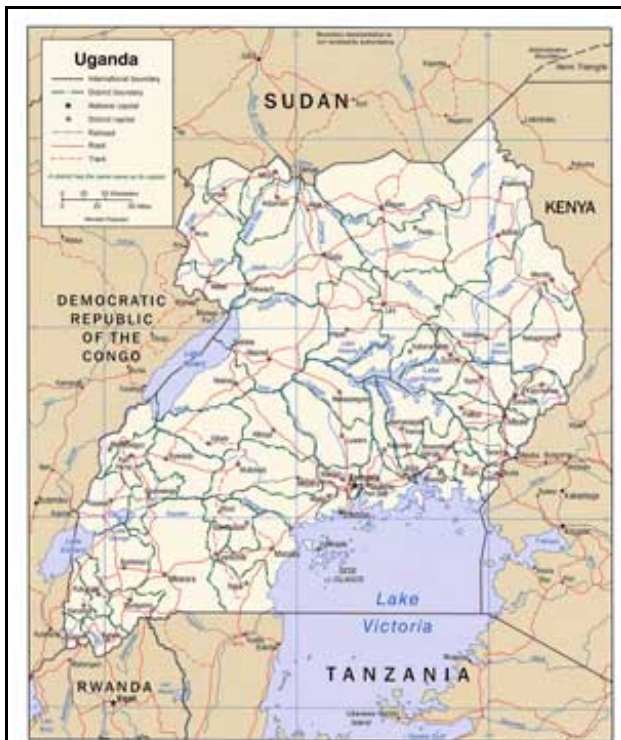
Due to the insurgency of the Lord's Resistance Army against the Ugandan government, landmines have been placed by various groups throughout the country for the past two decades. In the early 1980s both rebel groups and Ugandan government forces laid mines. Since then, there have been no allegations of government use inside Uganda, though the Lord's Resistance Army continues to use anti-personnel mines.¹ Though the landmine and unexploded ordnance problem is not as severe as in other parts of the continent, these remnants of war continue to injure or kill civilians as well as pose a problem for returning refugees in the northern, northeastern and western parts of the country.² According to the United Nations, approximately 400 square kilometers (154 square miles) are believed to be contaminated by mines or UXO.¹

Casualties

The Inter-Agency Mine Action Assessment Mission to Uganda reports that since 1998, 425 people have been killed by mines or UXO and about 400 have lost a limb.¹ In 2004, at least 31 new cases of mine incidents were reported, including the death of a soldier and the injury of his driver when a vehicle hired by a BBC crew was destroyed after hitting a landmine.¹ More recently, in the first quarter of 2005, four people were killed by mines and 10 injured. Though limited information is available from hospital records, media reports and information collected by nongovernmental organizations, there is no official, comprehensive data-collection system for mine casualties.

Clearance

Uganda has agreed to Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention³ and therefore must destroy all AP



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

mines in contaminated areas as soon as possible and before August 1, 2009. As of May 2005, Ugandan officials believe this goal to be attainable and state the most severe humanitarian and economic effects of mines and UXO should be cleared by this date.¹

In April 2006, Ugandan authorities established a team of officials to locate and clear mined areas to ensure safe passage for some 1.7 million internally displaced persons to return home.⁴ Contaminated areas in Soroti, Amuria and Lira will be first on the list for clearance. In addition to a clear path for their homecoming, returnees will also receive mine-risk education and a resettlement package of food, seeds and farming supplies, including ox-drawn ploughs.⁴

Mine-risk Education

Uganda does not have a centrally coordinated national mine-risk education program. Organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme, Mines Awareness Trust, *Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale* and Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief combine efforts to provide MRE support to the country.¹ Activities have included MRE training for teachers and religious leaders, group discussions and workshops.

AVSI and the District Rehabilitation Office hold training sessions on landmine recognition and distribute a training kit to facilitate future MRE. One innovative idea AVSI has implemented is printing and distributing mine/UXO warning stickers to be placed on large containers as a reminder of the landmine risk when collecting water. On Feb. 15, 2005, AVSI hosted U.S. Ambassador Jimmy Kolker, who traveled to northern Uganda to promote landmine awareness. While in the area, the ambassador met with and offered encouragement to local community leaders responsible for MRE activities.⁵ In April 2006, Acting UNDP Resident Representative Cornellis Klein called for MRE activities to be accelerated in areas where IDPs are returning.⁶

Progress

On April 4, 2006, Uganda participated in commemorating the first International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.⁶ Organized by the Office of the Prime Minister and the UNDP, mine demonstrations, awareness campaigns and advocacy activities were held in Kampala. In attendance were 59 engineers from the Ugandan Police, the national army and the Uganda People's Defense Force. Members of these organizations have all been trained by the UNDP in international humanitarian mine-clearance standards.

As part of the day's activities, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Disaster Preparedness and Refugees Lt. General Moses Ali officially opened Uganda's new mine-action center. The center will function in accordance with the International Mine Action Standards and will operate using the newest version of the Information Management System for Mine Action (version 4.0).⁶ Ali also made a statement calling for heightened MRE efforts and advanced assistance for landmine survivors. He went on to challenge awareness campaigns to target schools in hopes of preventing children from mistaking mines for toys.

Conclusion

In keeping with Uganda's commitment to clear mines by 2009, officials remain focused on removal efforts in areas used by returning IDPs. There has been a gradual movement of people from larger camps to smaller settlements closer to their homes and farmland. Of the 18,000 people displaced to urban areas, 7,000 have been able to relocate.⁴

Biography

Sarah Sensamaust graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in international relations and a concentration in African studies. She currently lives in Keezletown, Va., but will soon move with her husband to Cairo, Egypt, to pursue her master's degree in professional development.



Endnotes

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