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## Belarus

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# BELARUS



Gomel, Minsk, the capital, and the most heavily mined area, Vitebsk. Many of the officials in Belarus are trying to educate the people and show them the proper way to handle a mine if encountered and more importantly, what *not* to do. Two non-governmental organizations, the Belarus Support Center for Associations and Foundations (SCAF), and the Belarus Campaign to Ban Landmines (BCBL), are working with the Belarussian government to help promote safety and build solid support centers for the victims of landmines. SCAF, established in 1996, strives to develop the culture and society of Belarus by supporting other NGO initiatives such as the BCBL. Founded in 1998, BCBL supports the public education of all locals on how to deal with landmines and UXO when discovered. Despite government help and education, it is speculated that Belarus may make landmines and place them within their own boundaries as well as ship them elsewhere. Against this charge, the Ministry of Defense stated that Belarus had neither produced nor ever will produce any type of landmine.

**VICTIMS AND CASUALTIES:** Bela-russian victims can be categorized into three groups to best assess the damage done to their culture. The three categories are:

- Civilians affected *during* World War II as children (Gomel 1941-1945)
- Civilians affected by UXOs *left after* World War II
- Former military personnel during the Afghanistan war in the 1980s

These three groups can summarize the devastation and pain that Belarus has

had to face over the past century. Even though much of the country is rural, there are several hospitals that can help with the basic medical needs of the locals. There are simple hospitals to care for minor injuries, but there are also some prosthetic and rehabilitation centers that format special individual programs for individual patients. This concept helps not only the landmine victims, but their families and communities also. The overall perception of landmine victims and their assistance to try to be as helpful as possible and to protect them. The government has also established rules that allow the disabled to maintain their jobs with pay even while being absent. This attitude helps to establish a better relationship between the Belarussian government and its people.

**DEMINEING:** There is no national program of destroying landmines except through the military, the Department of Engineer Forces in Main Headquarters of the Belarus Military Forces, which formed over 44 groups to separate and look carefully for mines. Once discovered, the mines are either disposed of on-site or taken to a safe

location and destroyed. Reports show that from 1991-1997 over 120,000 UXO and 1,000 AP mines were destroyed in the area of just 300 kilometers (\$12,000 per kilometer). In 1996, over 10,700 UXO were destroyed at a cost of \$100,000. A lack of funds has left many landmines uncleared and left many more people in danger. All of the land that has been cleared have benefited the locals who use it for agricultural purposes.

**WAR REALITY CHECK:** There have been many people maimed or killed as a result of these undiscovered landmines, and the horror stories of the victims and their families' pain touches the hearts of many who have listened to each individual story and understood the unfairness. The story of Alexey Dralov and Alexey Toliadonok swept throughout Belarus in 1998. Two teenage girls, both age 17, were killed by a UXO while walking near a railway station in Krugleuschina, the Dokshitshi district. Vitebsk is one of the most heavily mined areas and even though most of the landmines are usually placed in rural fields, in which few travelers pass. There is still a threat to farmers and civilians even today.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Belarus Campaign to Ban Landmines  
Natalia Yakavets  
16 Korolia Street, Suite 301  
Minsk, Belarus 220004  
Tel: +375-172-105-751  
Fax: +375-172-347-129  
E-mail: izag@user.unibel.by

