CROATIA

HISTORY: Croatia ceded from Yugoslavia in 1991. Cessation prompted a crackdown by Belgrade and an uprising by the Serbian minority. During the war of independence millions of mines were planted and the main cities were bombed. Western Slovenia and the Krajina were under the control of Serb forces loyal to Belgrade until April 1995 when Croatian HVO forces retook Western Slovenia. Zagreb was shelled in retaliation. In August 1995 Croatian forces swept across the border of Bosnia and Herzegovina to pursue the fleeing Serbs, and to dislodge Serb forces near Croatian territory. Croatian officials came out of the Dayton Peace Accords of November 1995, with an agreement by Belgrade that Serbs vacate the disputed and oil-rich Slavonia region. Eastern Slovenia was returned to Croatian control on Jan.15, 1998.

LANDMINE AND UXO OVERVIEW: Authorities estimate that there may be as many as 3 million mines in Croatia with most laying along the former confrontation line. Both sides of the conflict made liberal use of mines. Mines were laid to protect defensive positions and in areas of strategic and economic importance: railways, utility stations, pipelines and even Plitvice National Park. Most mine fields are unmarked. Where marking does exist, it may not be accurate. As a result of four years of fighting, there is considerable UXO, over 300 tons, in areas where there has been conflict, like Dubrovnik. At least 5,200 miles of Croatian territory is littered with mines with at least 3,000 miles in Eastern Slovenia, the last Serb held territory. Fifteen-thousand mines were laid in the area behind Sibenik close to a

popular tourist spot, the Krka waterfalls. The Croatian Ministry of Reconstruction estimates it will take at least eight years and $400 million to demine the republic.

VICTIMS AND CASUALTIES: Since 1990 over 700 people have been permanently disabled. There have been over 956 amputations. Other statistics state over 300 children have been killed and 1000 injured by mines. Between 1990-1998 other statistics report that 2,437 people have been injured or killed. Accurate statistics have been difficult to obtain, especially in Serb controlled regions. Currently, there are no prosthetic workshops or disability laws in Croatia. Mine victims receive first aid and medical assistance based on their health insurance coverage.

DEMINING: Mine clearance is currently underway. Previously, Croatian mine clearance had been carried out by the Croatian Army, Special Police and Civilian Defense. In June 1996, the Croatian Government established a demining agency known as MUNGOS. In Eastern Slovenia, two Serbian demining agencies, TNT and DESK are conducting mine clearance under contract with MUNGOS. In

February 1998 national law was changed to allow for more international participation. Between 1995-1998 some 50,000 mines were removed.

WAR REALITY CHECK: Amnesty International reported civilian torture when the Yugoslavian National Army moved into Lovas, Croatia followed by Serbian paramilitary. After beating and killing many civilians, 50 civilian males were ordered into a field to pick grapes. They entered the field holding each other by the hand and quickly realized they were entering a mine field. Upon spotting a trip wire they stopped, at which point they were ordered to pull it by hand. A series of landmine explosions followed interspersed with machine-gun shots. The account describes some of the victims being so badly wounded that they begged to be killed.

THE CROATIAN MINE ACTION CENTER (HCR): In 1998, the Croatian government established the Croatian Mine Action Center to aid Croatia in their mine action programs. HCR provides assistance in all aspects of mine clearance to include mine awareness, mine surveys and minefield marking. Based in Zagreb, HCR is also active in raising funds for mine-related activities.

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