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## Norwegian People's Aid Emphasizes Cooperation as Core of Demining Efforts

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# The Journal of Humanitarian Demining



## Norwegian People's Aid Emphasizes Cooperation as Core of Demining Efforts

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HDIC

Back to Contents

Call For Papers

Submission Guidelines

E-mail the Journal

Journal Staff

Editorial Board

To HDIC Webpage

Back Issues

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Information in this issue may be out of date. [Click here](#) to link to the most recent issue.

One of the more prominent organizations currently working in the field of demining is Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). Founded in 1939 as a part of the Norwegian labor movement, the NPA has spent the past fifty years devoting its time and efforts to issues involving solidarity, unity, human dignity, peace, and freedom. By focusing on political freedom and social and economic justice, the NPA has become a leader in global human rights and the struggle to attain human dignity.

The organization is based on the ideology that people should always come first, and the NPA not only looks at persons in terms of individuals but also in terms of groups and societies. The organization also advocates the notion of helping one's self but that not all individuals are in a position that allows them to do so. In such cases, common strength resulting from cooperative efforts needs to be used to attain a common goal, and, in the end, this cooperative approach will help all involved. As a result of this ideology, NPA members view themselves as "people's aiders" who wish to improve both their own living conditions and those of their fellow human beings. The NPA's early activities focused on European labor movements and the struggles that these movements had with Fascism and Nazism during the Second World War.

During the war, the NPA expanded its labor-based activities and became involved with issues of preventative health care through the Worker's Health Care Program. After the war, the organization played an important role in rebuilding Norway, especially in rebuilding the country's health care system. In the 1980s, the NPA began to expand its activities to other regions of the globe. These new international ventures focused on Africa (particularly the Southern and the Horn regions of the continent), the Middle East, and Latin America. From there, the NPA again expanded its operations to include the war-torn areas of Eastern Europe, particularly Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. At present, the NPA is involved in thirty countries throughout the world, and its current international activities include

- long term development assistance in agriculture, production, health-care, psycho-social assistance, self-organization, and human rights;

- emergency assistance that includes rehabilitation, medical aid, and mobile clinics;
- mine-clearance and mine-awareness programs; and
- conflict prevention and resolution.

The NPA has also become involved with violence against women and refugee-related activities.

The NPA first became involved in the process of demining in 1992 when it was attempting to map the northwestern regions of Cambodia. Throughout this process, the NPA took a two-pronged approach that reflected its philosophy of people helping themselves and people helping each other, for not only did it actively pursue demining activities, but it also taught the Cambodians how to undertake such operations on their own. As a result of these activities, Cambodia is on the verge of taking over and running its own demining program.

Since 1992, the NPA has also become involved in mining activities in other areas including Mozambique, Angola, and Iraq. In all these areas, the NPA has continued to use its philosophy of self-help and cooperation to demine these areas and to teach inhabitants how to establish their own demining activities. For example, in Mozambique, the NPA trains deminers and has established a center for training mine detecting dogs and their handlers. In the case of Angola, the NPA has concentrated on clearing the main road between the cities of Luanda and Malange, has begun mapping minefields in the country, and has initiated an extensive mine awareness campaign. The NPA's Iraq activities similarly focus on self-reliance by teaching demining and advanced first aid skills to the inhabitants of the Iraqi province of Kurdistan.

As a result of these various international demining activities, the NPA has developed a complete program to meet the many challenges that countries with serious mine problems might have to face. As with other NPA demining activities, this complete program is designed to begin the demining process and to train local authorities in aspects of demining, and the program is designed in a way that allows local authorities to take over a country's demining activities after five years of cooperative demining activities. This self-reliant demining process focuses on six areas that can all be easily adapted to meet the conditions of any country. These six areas are

- mapping mine fields,
- training and organizing local de-miners,
- beginning the demining process in an area,
- conducting mine awareness programs,
- developing new methods for demining, and
- lobbying local and international lawmakers for a total ban on anti-personnel mines.

In addition to these demining activities, the NPA also maintains a website entitled "Landmines-The Silent Killers," located at <http://www.npaid.no/mines/>. This site contains a collection of articles and information on landmines and demining activities. For further information about the NPA and its activities, visit the NPA web site at <http://www.npaid.no/npaid/npa.html>.

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