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Demining in Suriname

Since 1992, when a peace agreement was reached in Suriname, the OAS has been instrumental in demining activities throughout the country. The efforts of the Surinamese National Army as well as those of other governments have aided the country in clearing mine-affected areas and allowing civilians to return to their homes.

by A. Edgardo C. Reis, *Chief Coordinator, OAS Special Mission to Suriname*

Background

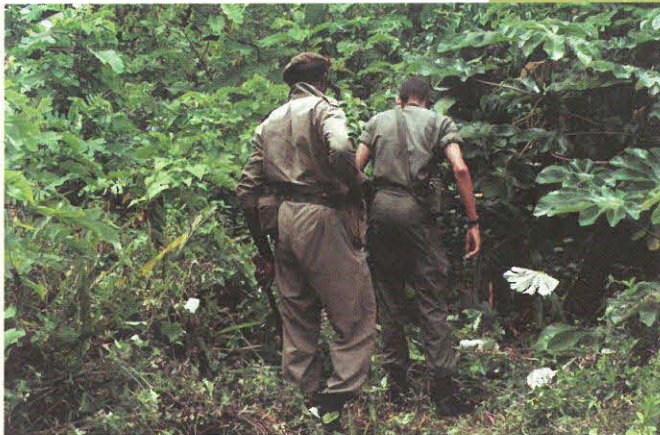
After achieving independence in 1975, the Republic of Suriname experienced periods of intense political and economic instability. In 1986, a guerilla war broke out in the eastern region of the country and for the next six years, the Surinamese armed forces were involved in a bloody conflict with five illegally-armed groups.

A Long-Awaited Peace

With the assistance of the Organization of American States (OAS), the Republic of Suriname and the illegally-armed groups signed a peace accord in August 1992. As soon as the demobilization process was completed, the OAS, through a Special Mission to Suriname (SMS), helped the Surinamese National Army destroy the weapons handed over to the Mission and conduct demining activities in four zones of the country: two along the coast (Albina and the area around the main road across the Commewijne River) and two in the interior (Stoelmanseiland and Carolina bridge).

Making Strides in Demining

The demining operations were an international effort supported by the governments of Guyana and Brazil, which donated the demining equipment, and with the financial



■ Deminers working in Suriname. The terrain is comprised mainly of rain forests. *c/o OAS*

support of Holland. The mine-clearing activities were conducted by members of the Surinamese Army, technically supported by members of the Brazilian military and supervised and assisted by OAS. The operations concentrated mostly in comb-

ing the mined areas in search of booby-traps and anti-personnel landmines. Hundreds of weapons, booby traps and mines were destroyed, allowing former inhabitants of the areas, who were refugees in neighboring French Guyana, to return to their homes during the following years. ■

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