



# Landmines in Latin America

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## Inner Workings of the OAS

**The OAS coordinates its mine action efforts with myriad organizations and governmental agencies as it moves towards its goal of transforming the Western Hemisphere into a mine-free zone. Presently providing assistance to six mine-affected countries, the OAS functions across a broad range of mine action activities including humanitarian demining and victim assistance.**

by **Mary Ruberry**, MAIC

### Introduction

The Organization of American States (OAS) is made up of 34 member countries that together address a gamut of hemispheric issues with the intention of reaching viable solutions. Additionally, the OAS creates and maintains an array of support programs ranging from overseeing elections to ensure democratic processes, to trying to establish a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), to ridding Latin America of landmines that have resulted from years of conflict. Many of the programs that the OAS runs arose from mandates established through the Summit of the Americas process in which heads of state confer. The OAS works with NGO's, governmental agencies, militaries, and donor countries to keep its programs thriving.

Last April, Quebec drew international attention during the 3rd Summit of the Americas. Though focused primarily on "free trade," the 2001 Summit also addressed landmines in its Action Plan, reaffirming the OAS' goal of transforming the Western Hemisphere into a mine-free zone, which was first declared in 1996. Since then, the OAS has consistently upheld this goal, and called on its member states to sign and ratify the 1997 Ottawa Convention.

### The Collaborative Nature of the OAS' Work

In May 2001, when I spoke with Carl Case, Technical Coordinator in the OAS' D.C. headquarters, he explained the inherently collaborative nature of the OAS' landmine program. "There are a lot of different organizations, whether NGO's, international organizations, or elements of national governments that are out there in the business of mine action or want to be involved in it, and so it can be a very complicated process to get everybody pulling in the same direction."

The challenge to coordinating national programs, according to Mr. Case, is the "size and number of actors involved. You've got to try and work with everybody the best that you can and sometimes they've got different interests and don't necessarily see eye-to-eye." Each program is the domain of the country where the program is located. The OAS strives to support each country's program to "help the process along." Participating countries must have their own mine action authorities. "They're the ones [who] make the decisions on what the priorities are and how things get done." The OAS aims to give advice when asked for, raise funds, and generally "...

provide [countries] with the resources that they lack themselves."

The OAS works with the donor countries' governments to manage the funds and keep them informed in order to "...stay in their good graces so that we keep money flowing into the program." The OAS' mine action program is expected to grow from its present budget of \$6 million to \$14 million over the next couple of years. Mr. Case referred to the program's burgeoning cost as "significant considerations for the program" because the OAS has to keep the program "financially solvent in order for it to stay successful."

The OAS also functions on a diplomatic level actively supporting a ban on AP mines in the hemisphere and urging member states to comply with the provisions of the Ottawa Convention. In particular, the OAS has worked with Canada and Argentina to present a stockpile destruction conference as a way to focus attention on stockpile issues. The OAS also presented a conference in Colombia to try to encourage a program there for stockpile destruction and other mine action issues.

Though working with many participants amounts to the greatest challenge to the OAS' coordination efforts, Mr. Case discussed positive results that can emerge from the involvement of multiple players. "But when you get all these things involved, it makes things very complicated and sometimes it's burdensome, but also it brings a lot of ideas to the table and you get new thoughts that are brought in and it refreshes the program."

#### *Responding to Affected Countries' Requests*

When a country that is affected by landmines desires aid from the OAS, its government simply makes an official request to the OAS Secretary General, and an assistance program is implemented "if the conditions are in place." "It has to be feasible to set up a program in the country, then we would respond positively." For example, if the Colombian government requested an OAS program in its country, the Organization would have difficulty setting up and running a program there because of the ongoing conflict. However, Mr. Case emphasized that if Colombia wanted to establish some kind of mine action activities, the OAS would "bend over backwards to help them."

Three kinds of agreements are used as the bases for setting up a program in each country. First, a document is agreed upon that describes the responsibilities of each participant in the program—"who does what." Second, a "typical diplomatic type of document" is signed that gives certain privileges and immunities to people working in the program. And the third document is the proposed budget that stipulates what the OAS will provide. "This is the document that is changed most" and updated periodically.

#### *The Landmine Database*

According to Mr. Case, the OAS' landmine database has been in use since the beginning of this year in Nicaragua. Information on victims and mine fields is entered daily into the database, transferring years of accumulated data along with the incoming reports. Also, OAS member states are asked to provide statements of their landmine status through the State Parties Meetings, the OAS or the IADB, though apparently less than one-third of the member states have done so.

### **Overview of the OAS Landmine Program**

#### *Assistance Program for Demining in Central America (PADCA, Programa de Asistencia para el Desminado en Centroamérica)*

PADCA was created by the OAS as a humanitarian project in 1991 in response to a request for assistance from Nicaragua. The OAS asked the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) to study the landmine issue in Nicaragua for possible solutions and

recommendations. The IADB put together a commission charged with conducting a technical analysis of Nicaragua's needs, which subsequently provided its conclusions to the OAS.

In May 1992, the OAS adopted Resolution 1191 which pledged support for the Central American peace process, recognized IADB's mine efforts in Nicaragua, and established a fund for accepting contributions from international donors to support mine clearance operations. Following this resolution, the other Central American republics also requested demining assistance from the OAS.

Responsibility for PADCA has been assigned to OAS' Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) since 1995. Through PADCA, the UPD/OAS raises funds from the international community, administers and supervises the funds, and coordinates the program at the policy and diplomatic levels. PADCA ensures that all parts of each national mine clearance project is running smoothly including:

- Communications
- Evacuation and emergency systems
- Equipment and food for the sappers
- Insurance and a stipend for the supervisors and sappers

PADCA's programs are run in 6-month modules based on agreements between the affected country and the OAS, and funded according to estimated operating budgets and resource needs. PADCA guarantees accountability and transparency in the use of funds provided by international donors, and that the demining efforts meet international standards.

### [Costa Rica](#)

During 2000, several areas that previously contained mines were rehabilitated, including Las Tablillas, La Trocha, El Refugio, Finca Sandoval, and Peña Blanca. The public information campaign produced a new series of mine awareness articles that were distributed to school children in affected areas. As a result, residents have reported the location of mines to OAS representatives to effect mine clearance and destruction. Additionally, new camping equipment and medicine for program supervisors and sappers were provided through the UPD and the Ministry of Public Security.

### [Guatemala](#)

PADCA's public information campaign received UNICEF's prize for communication last October in a ceremony attended by Guatemalan President Alfonso Antonio Portillo Cabrera and UNICEF officials. The campaign titled No Juguemos con la Muerte ("Let's Not Play With Death") reached the public through a variety of media including posters and radio.

### [Honduras](#)

Honduras is racing to reach mine-free status by the Meeting of the States Parties in September, and is expected to complete mine clearance operations by then. During the meeting, Honduras officials plan to present a celebration in honor of their success. In the last two and a half years, only one civilian has been injured by a landmine in that country.

### [Nicaragua](#)

Radio Corporación has carried a series of broadcasts about AP mines as part of the country's public information campaign continuing this year. Training was conducted last October by the U.S. Special Forces for a Nicaraguan platoon that will destroy stockpiled mines and support demining operations in northern Nicaragua. At the inception of the OAS program, Nicaragua reported 135,000 buried AP mines, but has

since cleared 67,000 mines

[Program for Demining Assistance in Ecuador/Peru \(PADEP, Programa de Assistência para a Remoção de Minas no Ecuador/Peru\)](#)

In March of 1999, the governments of Peru and Ecuador made a formal request to the OAS for establishing a fund to support demining along the previously disputed border in the Cordillera del Condor region. Since the requests, the OAS has put together PADEP to support demining in Peru and Ecuador through agreements signed last spring. With 450,000-500,000 mines between them, Ecuador and Peru pose a considerable challenge for stockpile destruction and demining expected to take ten years to complete.

*Canine Mine Detection*

In 1998, PADCA implemented the canine mine detection project that currently provides four dogs to Honduras, four to Costa Rica, and ten to Nicaragua. The dogs receive the initial landmine training from Global Training of San Antonio, Texas, and then are given handler training by Ronco Consulting Corporation of Washington, D.C. Ronco also sets up an administrative structure that is handed over to the OAS after two years, though the actual program structure within each country is designated by the affected nation.

*Rehabilitation Program for Victims of Antipersonnel Mines*

Because of the localized mine problem, the OAS established a rehabilitation center in Nicaragua in 1997, which has served more than 300 mine victims (three from other countries). Last year, the OAS signed an agreement with the International Rehabilitation Center for a Plan of Action to create educational materials and implement employment programs for Central America's victims of AP mines and UXO. Also in 2000, the OAS worked co-operatively with the Pan American Health Organization to put together programs for victim assistance, rehabilitation, and integration, as well as awareness education for endangered populations. The OAS also worked jointly with the Trust for the Americas to promote beneficial initiatives for mine victims.

*Inter-American Defense Board (IADB)*

Technical support for PADCA is provided by the Inter-American Defense Board, an independent organization established during World War II to ensure hemispheric security. The IADB organizes the international team of supervisors in the four participating countries (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). The team of 30 experts provides technical and logistical assistance, oversees national mine clearing projects, trains sappers, and certifies that mine clearance operations meet international safety standards.

The IADB's team of international supervisors and military trainers are called the Assistance Mission for Mine Clearance in Central America (MARMINCA, Misión de Asistencia para la Remoción de Minas en Centroamérica). IADB member nations provide supervisors and trainers at no cost to the program or the beneficiary countries.

Though headquartered in Managua, Nicaragua, MARMINCA maintains offices in each of the four assisted countries where MARMINCA supervisors work directly with each country's demining units.

MARMINCA experts provide:

- International supervision
- Technical advice
- Planning assistance

- Training
- Certification of methods and procedures

*Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines (AICMA, Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal)*

Because OAS' range of landmine work expanded beyond merely demining, in 1998 PADCA was integrated into the newly-created Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines, or AICMA, which encompasses:

- Mine risk awareness education for the civilian population,
- Support for mine field surveying, mapping, marking, and clearance,
- Victim assistance, including physical and psychological rehabilitation and the re-introduction of cleared zones,
- Support for a total ban on AP mines in the Western Hemisphere, and
- Establishment of a database on landmine information in the region.

Though the OAS' landmine program is often still referred to as PADCA, in essence PADCA has been replaced by the broader-scoped AICMA.

*Mine Action Evolution*

Mr. Case believes that the "mine action business has become more sophisticated over the last ten years. Before it was simply "Let's give these guys some mine detectors and explosives and send them off to do great works." Now it requires a lot more of a process and there are a lot more aspects to it." Mr. Case referred to the international mine action standards that have become considerably more voluminous with time. "That tells you how much sophistication is involved in mine action nowadays and you've got to consider all that. It's a management problem of great proportions when you throw all these different factors in."

## **Biography**

Mr. Carl Case retired from the United States Army last year as a Colonel after serving the Army Infantry office for 26 years. Before retiring, Mr. Case also spent three years working with the IADB's mine action program.

*\*All photos courtesy of IADB*

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