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Geneva Diary: Report from the GICHD

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International Mine Action

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Geneva International Centre for
Humanitarian Demining
Centre International de
Déminage Humanitaire - Genève



Geneva Diary: Report from the GICHD

The GICHD works with numerous organizations to assist demining efforts in Central and South America. Through programs such as IMSMA and the Afghan Dog Program, GICHD has contributed significantly to mine action in Latin America and continues to do so.

by P. M. Blagden, Technical Director, GICHD

GICHD Activities in Latin America

The Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) is increasing its contacts with Central and South America, mainly through briefings and seminars. The seminars that took place on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) in Managua in January 2001 and in Lima in March 2001 were typical. There have also been presentations on the International Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), the most recent of which have been to the Organization of American States (OAS) in Nicaragua, followed by a successful briefing in Bogota, Colombia, in June 2001. The GICHD also organized a Stockpile Destruction Seminar in Argentina in December 2000. We conducted a country case study in Nicaragua on the roles of agencies involved in mine action and victim assistance. We anticipate that our contacts in the Latin American region will increase considerably over the next few months.

Brief Updates

Support for the Mine Ban Treaty

The reports for the last Standing Committees will be available on the GICHD website in early July 2001. We

are now preparing for the Third Meeting of States Parties in Managua next September.

Support for Field Operations

Version 2.0 of IMSMA is now being distributed, and IMSMA training continues.

Enabling Research Studies

The socio-economic study has been published, and copies are available from UNDP and the GICHD. Thirty-one IMASs have been passed to the United Nations for endorsement and publication in October 2001. We have started the Mechanical Equipment Study, a study into the Afghan Dog Program and an evaluation of Military to Military Training for the U.S. State Department.

Discussion Topic

The discussion topic for this issue is the study into the Afghan Dog Program. The use of dogs for demining purposes in Afghanistan was initiated in 1989, and the project passed to full local control in 1994. Since that time, the Afghan demining NGOs have maintained an ongoing breeding and training program, and they currently have more than 130 operational dogs—the largest such program in the world. The United Nations Mine Action Program in Afghanistan has requested that the GICHD man-

age a research program with two main objectives: to determine the capabilities of dogs to detect mines in Afghan soil and to set up mechanisms for testing all the dogs in Afghanistan as part of a future accreditation system.

Beneficiaries

The primary beneficiary of this study will be the mine action program in Afghanistan, which is looking for a considerable improvement in operational procedures and cost effectiveness. The study will also provide a detailed assessment of the causes of variation in the ability of dogs to locate mines. That information will interest and benefit all mine clearance programs using dogs. Donors to these programs will also benefit from the increases in cost effectiveness. The ultimate beneficiaries will be demining teams and mine-affected communities, who will benefit from quicker, safer and more reliable mine clearance.

Comments

Although dogs have now been used in demining for 60 years, there has been almost no investment in research and development on the use of dogs for demining purposes. This study represents an important step forward in improving understanding of the relationship between a dog's nose and the availability of the odor from a mine. By attempting to understand why dogs sometimes miss mines, the study will help improve the operational efficiency of dogs and will potentially validate the use of dogs as mine detection tools. Improved understanding of the capabilities and limitations of dogs will ensure a more objective assessment of the role of dogs in mine action. With the increasing success of dog programs, this assessment will mean that the full potential for increased efficiency of mine action operations will become more generally realized, which in turn will mean that scarce donor resources will be used to obtain the maximum value for the available money. ■

GICHD Brief Facts and Figures

Established: April 1998

Started: May 1999

Current staff: 24

Three main functions:

- Support the MBT
- Support field operations, including IMSMA
- Carry out enabling studies

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