

Landmines in Latin America



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History

Colombia's history has been distinguished by strife, insurrection, violence, and civil war. The country's internal conflicts have engaged the two ruling parties (the Conservatives and the Liberals), in the form of coups and assassinations, controversies involving the Catholic Church, and powerful guerrilla groups. A thriving drug trade has contributed to Colombia's 40-year guerrilla war and rebel forces' control of much of the countryside. Additionally, powerful drug traffickers have spawned well-equipped paramilitary groups credited with 78 percent of the human rights violations in the country.

Landmine/UXO Overview

Colombia is considered the most mine-affected country in the Western Hemisphere. About 15 percent of the nation's territory contains at least 100,000 landmines, according to Campana Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM, the Colombian Campaign Against Landmines). All the warring parties in Colombia use AP mines, although the Colombian government's mine production facilities were destroyed in 1999. Government officials have stated that they use AP mines as a defense measure, and guerrillas have openly admitted to manufacturing and using AP mines. The paramilitary groups that are closely aligned to the military also use AP mines.

Guerrilla groups make homemade mines with materials that are cheap and easy to find. The Colombian Army has reported an increase in guerrillas' use of homemade anti-vehicle mines. Additionally, many of those producing illegal drugs make and use AP mines to keep unwanted intruders out of their fields and manufacturing facilities. Even farmers use landmines as a way to protect their livestock from theft.

The CCCM reports 600 injuries and 200 deaths caused by AP mines between 1991 and 2000. However, the CCCM believes the number of casualties is significantly higher than reported because no national system exists for tracking non-military accidents.

The number of landmine victims has significantly increased in the last 10 years. Landmine incidents in early 2000 rose to one accident every four or five days. In some areas, parents refuse to send their children to school due to fear of landmines. Last year in Sumapaz, the Army's Fifth Division discovered 52 AP mines near the village school.



Landmine use has contributed to mass displacements of Colombians. In 1999 more than 288,000 Colombians fled their homes as a result of the fighting, and an estimated 134,000 Colombians were newly displaced during the first half of 2000.

Non-military landmine victims (and other victims of violence) have not received compensation for their injuries and loss.

Demining

Currently, no humanitarian demining programs exist in Colombia, and both manufactured and homemade AP mines are used by all the major warring parties (guerrilla groups, government forces and the paramilitary).

In October 1999 Colombia's Canadian Embassy, Ministry of Communications and UNICEF Colombia implemented a national mine awareness program. CCCM, the Colombian Red Cross, and the Scouts of Colombia are all responsible for designing and disseminating prevention materials.

Reality Check

Colombia's reputation for human rights violations is considered to be one of the worst on earth by international human rights groups.

The violence is largely responsible for the current economic difficulties in Colombia. According to one economist, the direct cost of the violence in Colombia totals 11.4 percent of the GNP (almost \$10 billion (U.S.) per year).

Profiles have been compiled from The Landmine Monitor Report, regional MACs, and wire and media reports.
