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Landmines in Latin America

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History

When Central America declared independence from Spain in 1821, Costa Rica was drawn into border struggles with Nicaragua. Political rivalry between the two developing nations shaped territorial border disputes. Tensions escalated with the 1948 Costa Rican election of Don Pepe Figueres. A strong democratic advocate, Figueres was supported by Nicaraguans who opposed the Nicaraguan dictator, Somoza. Costa Rica supported the overthrow of Somoza's regime during the 1970s and 80s. Landmine contamination resulted from the government's allowance of Sandanista rebel military bases established in northern Costa Rican territories.

Costa Rica's northern border is contaminated with landmines placed during Nicaragua's civil uprising, which lasted over 12 years. The Ministry of Security's Mine Clearance Program estimates that approximately 3,491 mines are located along the Nicaraguan border in Los Chiles, Pocosol, Upala and La Cruz. Although this area primarily consists of agricultural land and small subsistence farms, a few mines have been found near villages.

Casualties

No official reports have been released regarding landmine victims in Costa Rica, but some information is provided by the Organization of American States (OAS), which has not reported any recent casualties.

Costa Rica has not established programs or specialized clinics for landmine victim assistance. With assistance from the Costa Rican Social Security Office, a medical camp was established in Los Chiles as a base for evacuation and medical operations. Treatment was provided to soldiers and civilians living near mined areas.



Demining

Although mine clearance operations were suspended in 1999 due to equipment needs, Costa Rica's demining activities have resumed and are scheduled for completion in June 2002. Mine clearance is carried out by the Sapper Unit of the Costa Rican Security Forces, two international supervisors, 41 deminers, and four mine-detecting dogs. Costa Rican demining operations have been cordoned into three sectors to divide the mine-affected territories. The chief of the Mine Clearance Program reported in April 2000 that 350 mines had been destroyed.

Reality Check

In April 2000 Costa Rica and nine other countries met in the Costa Rican capital to sign the Declaration of San José. Article 27 of the declaration reinforced each country's commitment to the promotion of the Ottawa Convention.

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