

Landmines in Latin America

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History

Ecuador has been plagued by a border dispute with Peru, dating from Greater Colombia's (made up of Colombia, Venezuela and Panama) breakup. The two countries have been fighting since 1995 over a 78-kilometer stretch of steep Amazonian rainforest, called the Cordillera del Condor, between the Cenepa and Zamora rivers.

Border clashes broke out in the region between 1938 and 1940, with Peru moving to settle the matter by force after a border clash in July 1941. The Peru-Ecuador War came to its conclusion with the Protocol of Rio de Janeiro, signed in 1942. Unfortunately, the agreements signed between the countries to settle disputes contain language describing inaccurate geography.

The United States supplied an aerial map of the region in 1947 that showed the inaccurate border markers, thus contributing to an enduring conflict between the two countries. Ecuador and Peru have fought three times over the Cordillera del Condor (in 1941, 1981 and 1995), but signed a standing peace accord in 1998.

Following a period of political and economic crises, Ecuador had the first coup d'état in Latin America in over a decade on Jan. 21, 2000, when the Ecuadorian military, allied with a coalition of indigenous groups, overthrew President Jamil Mahuad. The coup lasted briefly before control was handed back to then Vice President Gustavo Noboa.

Landmine / UXO Overview

The Latin American Association for Human Rights (ALDHU) has reported that both factions in the border conflict laid between 130,000 to 150,000 AP mines. Ecuador has reported five mine-affected areas from the border dispute, including the Cordillera del Condor, and the El Oro and Loja provinces.

Casualties

Exact figures of landmine accidents are not available for Ecuador because no system exists for gathering data. Other groups that are active in the region such as the ALDHU, the U.N. Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and the military have reported approximately 100 landmine casualties since the most recent border dispute in 1995.

The Aguaruna and Shuar groups of the Jibara, the traditional owners of the disputed land, live on both sides of the Ecuador-Peru border, and have suffered from the effects of AP mines laid along the disputed boundary. The Aguaruna Huambisa Council



reported that 28 local people were killed by landmines during the conflict. There are a total of 2,500 families and 20,000 total inhabitants affected by the war in the "frontier zones."

Demining

Ecuador has stated that it has not used AP mines since the war with Peru in 1995. However, the ALDHU told the United Nations in 1996 that mine laying was continuing along the disputed border, and that 10,000 mines had been laid since the 1995 ceasefire.

Ecuador's army has developed a plan with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to clear all mines by 2008, primarily through the work of the 23rd Cenepa Engineer Brigade, a company made up of six 15-man demining teams.

Reality Check

Local landmine victims have not been counted as casualties by Ecuadorian authorities, and therefore have not received compensation for their losses (though soldiers and their families are paid a remuneration).

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