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Landmines in Latin America

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History

After gaining independence from Spanish colonial domination in 1824, Peru developed as a diverse nation in respect to people, culture and industry. Railroads transporting mineral resources to ports situated along Peru's 1,500 miles of coastland pass through rural Indian villages and urban cities. Situated at the center of the Andean states, Peru is bordered by Colombia and Ecuador in the north, Brazil and Bolivia in the east and Chile in the south. Resurgent boundary conflicts with Ecuador and Chile led to Peru's landmine contamination.

Landmine/UXO

Peru's landmine problem relates primarily to the country's border conflicts. In 1995 over 60,000 landmines were laid along the foothills of the Cordillera del Cóndor region bordering Ecuador. Chile laid mines in Peruvian territory during border disputes in the 1970s and 1980s. Mine-affected areas are also located within the country's borders around public infrastructure. Electrical towers and power generation stations were mined for protection against guerrilla sabotage during Peru's internal uprisings in the late 1980s.



Casualties

The 2000 report from the director of the Information Office of the Ministry of Defense listed 130 AP mine victims in Peru, primarily from the Cordillera del Cóndor border region. From 1994 to 1999, 37 mine accidents were reported along the Peru-Ecuador border, involving 36 military personnel and one civilian. Two civilian mine accidents were reported along the Chilean border in 1994 and 1998, and in 1999 a mine accident killed one civilian and injured another. Seventy-two mine accidents around electrical installations involved national police, electrical employees, maintenance staff and civilians.

Demining

Mine action efforts in Peru are coordinated by the inter-ministerial Working Group on Antipersonnel Mines, which reported in May 2000 that a total of 32,373 AP mines have been cleared and destroyed. The Peruvian Army Engineers are responsible for demining the Peru-Ecuador border in two phases. In collaboration with the Ecuadorian military, the first phase was completed in 1999 with the placement of border markers. The second phase involves clearance of a major road connecting Ecuador and Peru.

Electrical companies are responsible for clearing mines around electrical installations, and in May 2000 Peru reported that 30,972 mines have been removed from electrical towers and public infrastructure.

Reality Check

Mine clearance for the Chilean border is pending upon ratification of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty by Chile, currently a signatory. Peru has not yet passed legislation to implement mine action, but several demining measures have been taken. These include directives to the military informing them of treaty obligations, the creation of a national committee for victim assistance, cooperation with Ecuador to clear their shared border and the designation of special units of demining engineers.

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