Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center: UNMEE-MACC

The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, along with eight other local NGOs, is working to rid their lands of the mixture of AT and AP mines laid in conventional military patterns during conflicts dated back to 1935.

By Bob Kudysa, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center

Background

The conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia can be traced back to before the period of Italian colonization, which commenced in 1935. Many attempts to secure an independent Eritrea finally succeeded in 1993, when Eritrea gained formal independence from Ethiopia. However, relations soured between the one-time allies when Eritrea introduced its own currency (the Nakfa) in November 1997, creating a trade war between the two nations.

On May 13, 1998, Ethiopia's Parliament declared war on Eritrea. After the 1998 fighting failed to achieve any clear advantage to either side, the Ethiopians and Eritreans fell into a trench warfare situation reminiscent of World(567,930),(927,994)

Landmine and UXOS

Situation

In addition to the residual threats posed by landmines and UXOs from old conflicts, the recent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998–2000) posed a significant threat throughout the conflict area. This threat is primarily confined to the "no man's land" that runs between the trenches along the confrontation lines (May 1998 and May—June 2000). These mine fields contain a mixture of AT and AP mines that are laid mainly in conventional military patterns. Additionally, unmarked and unrecorded mi-
The United Nations has selected the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to implement the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Mine Action Program on its behalf, initially through funds made available through the Voluntary Trust Fund (VTF) for assistance in mine action. This decision is consistent with the UN mine action policy of using which recognizes UNOPS as a principle service provider within the UN system for integrated mine action programs. If required, UNOPS will be capable of supporting the mine action program past the expiration of UNMEE's mandate and beyond the requirement for emergency assistance.

The Secretary General's report to the Security Council of 19 August 2000, stated the following objectives for the Mine Action Coordination Centre (MACC):

- To provide and coordinate mine action in support of the operational needs of the peacekeeping force, mainly inside the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), including the provision of technical advice and support to the mine clearance activities of the Ethiopian and Eritrean parties.
- To facilitate and coordinate international mine action assistance, in support of humanitarian relief efforts, including the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- The MACC will have the following responsibilities:
  - Assessing the landmine/UXO threat
  - Managing landmine information.
  - Planning and coordinating operations.
  - Managing quality assurance (QA).
  - Assisting with resource mobilization as necessary.

The MACC will establish mine action priorities to serve both operational needs of the peacekeeping force within the TSZ and wider humanitarian needs both inside and outside the TSZ. Based on these priorities, the MACC will use available mine action assets, including UN peacekeeping, NGOs, and commercial and government assets, in order to conduct mine action with an emphasis on:
- Mine Risk Education (MRE) for peacekeepers and UN, government and relief workers active in the previously contaminated areas.
- MRE for local population returning to these areas.
- Rapid mine survey of previously contaminated areas to better ascertain the extent and specific nature of the landmine/UXO problem in the previously contaminated areas.

NGOs in Eritrea

There are currently eight NGOs undertaking programs in Eritrea, namely Eritrean Demining Agency (EDA), Danish Church Aid (DCA), Danish Demining Group (DDG), HALO Trust, RONCO, RONCO/EDA and Mines Awareness Trust.

Eritrean Demining Agency

The EDA includes the following personnel:
- One 7-person manual clearance team deployed after a successful training phase.
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- Two 2-person EOD teams.
- Two 5-person Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams.
- One mine-marking team.

RONCO

RONCO consists of:
- Seven Explosive Detection dogs (EDD) and handlers.

RONCO/EDA

RONCO/EDA is made up of:
- Four 60-person manual clearance teams.

Mines Awareness Trust

Mines Awareness Trust contains the following teams:
- Four 4-person community based facilities developing a community-based MRE program to implement in both Sector West and Centre.

Mine/UXO Clearance Operations

In 2001, the MACC consolidated its position within the UNMEE concept of operations and orchestrated an extremely productive capability. Several new appointments have arrived to complement the existing MACC infrastructure, bringing a wealth of experience from other programs such as Yemen, Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Iraq and Afghanistan.

Clearance activities have centered on the TSZ, primarily in the western and central sectors. Priority is given to clearing areas where there is a confirmed landmine and UXO threat that impacts the local population or potential refugee populations.

Large areas of the TSZ were surveyed by the HALO Trust. A comprehensive National Landmine Impact Survey will be undertaken in 2002. This will permit an extensive review of dangerous areas and the allocation of resources, including MRE programs and mine victim support activities. This will be extensively supported by the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSSM) database.

Mine contamination is extensive, and most common mine types have been encountered within the region. The UXO contamination problem, while not unique, is responsible for a great percentage of accidents, particularly with teenage males, who are attracted to the shape and color of UXO and investigate objects out of boredom or curiosity.

A recent spate of incidents caused by deeply buried AT mines is a reason for concern and has led to the MACC working actively with the UNMEE force and related agencies in a concerted attempt to defeat the menace.

Training and National Capacity Building

With the arrival of additional international personnel, a training development plan has been mapped out, which focuses on building national capacity. Basic demining and team leader courses have been successfully completed, with Train-the-Trainer and Technical Survey courses to follow shortly. The focus of Train-the-Trainer courses will be to provide a core of national training cadre to staff the proposed National Training Centre, which is to be designed and constructed at Asna Golgod, outside Asmara.

This training center will be responsible for all national demining training activities and will be managed under direction of the Eritrean Mine Action Program (EMAP). The focus of this project is to build a sustainable national capacity for all demining activities in Eritrea.

EOD/UXO Problem and Solution

Eritrea has a serious UXO contamination problem; some 200,000—250,000 mines and three million pieces of UXO are said to be present in Eritrea. Older sources estimate between 500,000 and one million landmines. Either way, the amount of UXO liming Eritrea outnumbers the landmines by at least 3:1 and at worst 15:1. Perhaps as many as three million pieces of UXO remain at large in Eritrea. The majority of women and children killed or injured in Eritrea as a result of the debris of war in recent times have been struck down by UXO and not by landmines.

The range of UXO types encountered in Eritrea varies, although, as in most conflict environments, the vast majority are comprised of the smaller weapons of war such as grenades (including an array of rocket-propelled grenades), mortars and artillery projectiles. There are significant numbers of other...
items, ranging from cluster munitions and large airdropped bombs to projectiles and rockets. To date there have been no reports of chemical or biological weapons being used, and the body trap threat remains low.

The majority of the UXO contamination is in the Tesz, but other historical battle sites (such as Nafka and Keren in the north of the country and Massawa on the east coast) also present a significant challenge. Currently, there is no active UXO project covers to cope with the UXO problem in time to ensure the security of reunification and integration. Another move is afoot to provide direct EOD support to Mine Action agencies working in those areas most at risk.

The indigenous EOD capacity will be capable of planning, coordinating, contacting and conducting investigations. The responsibilities are achieved by implementing a comprehensive accreditation and licensing process based on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) as well as other mine action program documentation, from which the QA department has developed National Technical and Safety Standards (TSS). The TSS are used throughout the relevant organisations to ensure that all agencies and NGOs have to follow in order to receive accreditation and licensing before working in the mission area. Once the accreditation and licensing process is completed, the QA department transfers its attention to the field monitoring of the agency by performing site inspection at each work site at least once a month. This is supplemented by unannounced visits. The QA visit/inspection consists of evaluating and compiling a report on the particular site as well as conducting sample inspections in accordance with the TSS. The site manager signs a copy of the report, and a copy is left with him. The original report is forwarded to the Chief of QA who compiles all the required data with a cover letter and forwards it to the respective agencies for action. The QA approach being implemented in Eritrea is effective at this early stage of the program; the numbers of non-compliance are generally low, and to date there have been no demining-related accidents.

**Quality Assurance**

The QA department of the UNMEE MACC currently consists of a Chief of QA with two International Supervisors and three National QA Inspectors. These are divided into a headquarter element and two field teams. The aim of the QA department is to develop national capacities to assume responsibility for these functions in the future.

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**UNMEE-MACC**

One of the mandates of the MACC is to provide mine action information to UNMEE, other UN agencies, NGOs and mine action agencies working in Eritrea. This includes the collection, processing and dissemination of all mine-related information. The primary tool in the management of mine action information is the IMSSA database, The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETHZ) and the Swiss National Bank, and the Bonn Agreement.

Special attention is paid to the information and resources. The section currently handles some 15-20 requests for maps and reports per week. The following additional activities are planned to enhance the information system at MACC in 2002:

- Managing integration tools in software development and improving the system to move one step beyond the "inventory only" status and to give adequate tools to the management in terms of planning resources, timesframes, budgets and constraints.
- Integrating EOD into mine action (including landmines, anti-personnel and anti-tank mines).

Integrating MRE into mine action (with a special focus on the disposal of UXO from World War II) takes place in Eritrea. The UNMEE Qodcoordinator has assigned a full-time EOD coordinator to the UNMEE MACC to ensure a strong and long-term integration of EOD and MRE activities in Eritrea.

The UNMEE Qodcoordinator assists EMAP, EDA, UNMEE MACC, government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs in developing a comprehensive and well-integrated EOD program.

The UNMEE Qodcoordinator has already established an inter-agency EOD working group, which consists of UN agencies, national and international governments, ministries, agencies and NGOs, as well as mine clearance organisations. The group meets monthly in Asmara, a meeting by the group, which has been established, has been established.

Continuing to improve data quality.

**Mine Risk Education and Safety for Eritrea**

Starting in 1994, limited MRE activities were conducted in the context of the European Humanitarian Demining Program (EHPD). These were subsequently suspended in 1998 due to the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

After the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and the establishment of the TSZ EOD Support Group, the EOD technical support of UNICEF and the Eritrean Demining Agency (EDA), resumed MRE efforts in the form of emergency activities in the regions of Tessenet and Gash Barka. These activities were mainly concerned with identification, mapping, IED and UXO surveys. Since 2000, UNICEF, whose mandate of the Eritrean MRE program is to reduce the number of mini-UXO-related accidents and incidents among high-risk populations in the TSZ and adjacent areas through a comprehensive, well-integrated and multifaceted MRE program. The Eritrean MRE program aims at institutional and local capacity building, and at the EOD community facilitator's training, coordination and reporting mechanism establishment and the MAE integration into mine action and other humanitarian sectors.

The following is a list of the program's specific objectives:

- Establishing a national institutional MRE capacity;
- Coordinating MRE activities at the national and regional level;
- Integrating MRE activities with mine action and other humanitarian activities;
- Establishing national MRE training capacity;
- Coordinating community-based MRE in affected communities and for IDPs;
- Conducting MRE for returning refugees and following up with their respective communities;
- Incorporating MRE into the school system;
- Developing a mass media strategy for MRE;
- Conducting landmine safety training for peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel.

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