

News from the OAS

This article highlights recent news from the Organization of American States (OAS) Mine Action Program.



by Whitney Tolliver, MAIC

Success in Costa Rica

Since 1996, the OAS Mine Action Program has assisted the government of Costa Rica in its efforts of mine clearance, mine risk education (MRE) and victim rehabilitation. On December 10, 2002, the country became the first in the Americas to officially declare itself free of AP mines. Mine contamination within the country had been concentrated primarily along the northern border as a result of the conflict in Nicaragua. Costa Rica itself has never produced, imported, stockpiled or used AP mines.¹

Initiating the demining program proved to be difficult due to an absence of maps illustrating the mined zones in the country. Costa Rican local authorities and OAS officials estimated that a total of 5,000 AP mines possibly littered the

ground. This figure was later reduced with the help of the Inter-American Defense Board and local civilians in order to define three main contaminated areas: Alajulea, the Upala border and Guanacaste.

The clearance operations experienced a few temporary delays due to a lack of funds in December 2001 and an inconsistent availability of air medical evacuation support.² Once operations resumed, Costa Rican deminers were able to extract 338 AP mines and pieces of UXO in the marked areas, declaring the country mine free.

Costa Rica ratified the Ottawa Convention in 1999, and with mine clearance complete, has accomplished its goal well in advance of the treaty deadline.

Donor Contributions Make Mine Action Possible

With the increased demand for assistance in humanitarian demining in the Americas and other parts of the world, OAS Secretary General Cesar Gaviria hosted a donor conference on October 17, 2002. The event detailed the work of the OAS Mine Action Program and thanked donors for their support.

The conference resulted in a positive

outflow of continued contributions by donor governments. Norway donated \$475,893 (U.S.) to assist programs in Honduras and Guatemala; Italy contributed \$252,000 for demining operations in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua; and France committed \$75,000 towards a program to rehabilitate landmine victims. The most recent approximation of donated sums totals \$1,508,000 from the governments of France, Canada, Brazil, the United States and Norway. This follows contributions of more than \$24.5 million by 17 different countries since 1998.³

The OAS uses donor funds to finance modules of operations in recipient countries. The modules are divided into six-month time frames and cost approximately \$350,000–\$450,000 each. Currently, the OAS Mine Action Program is running modules in Honduras, Guatemala, Peru and Ecuador, and three operational fronts in Nicaragua. With only two more six-month modules, the OAS believes the government of Honduras will be able to declare the country a “landmine-free zone” this year.

The OAS also hopes to implement a new demining program in Colombia this year. The modules, however, are expensive and the OAS Mine Action Program

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■ (Left to Right) A monument placed in Costa Rica on December 10, 2002 as a remembrance of the conclusion of mine operations between the OAS and the government of Costa Rica. OAS mine awareness campaign in collaboration with civilian promoters at the Municipality of Murra in Nicaragua.



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continues to search for more funds to fulfill the needs of the affected countries. In sum, an estimated \$8 million is needed to sustain the program this year.

Nicaragua Completes a Mine Awareness Campaign

On October 31, 2002, the Nicaraguan government, in collaboration with the OAS Mine Action Program and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), completed a major mine awareness and MRE campaign in the department of Nueva Segovia. Much of the effort was lead by two Nicaraguan landmine

survivors who actively promoted the program.

The campaign emphasized the solicitation of information from local inhabitants about the location of mines near their homes. As a result, more than 400 mines and pieces of UXO were able to be located and destroyed. ■

**All information has been adapted with permission from El Desminado: A publication of the OAS Unit for the Promotion of Democracy. The publication can be directly accessed online at <http://www.upd.oas.org/lab/demining/ebulletin.html> or at http://www.upd.oas.org/lab/demining/ebulletin_spa.html for the publication in Spanish.*

**All photos courtesy of the OAS Mine Action Program.*

References

1. Article 7 Report, points 2, 4, 5 and 8, submitted 3 September 2001.
2. Report to the OAS/Committee on Hemispheric Security, held 14 March 2002.
3. OAS Weekly Report, 17 December 2002.

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