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News From the OAS

Kevin Dansereau

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

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News From the OAS

The following article features recent news from the Organization of American States (OAS) Mine Action Program.

by Kevin Dansereau, *MAIC*

Colombia and the OAS Agree on Mine Action Activities

Colombia, which ratified the AP Mine Ban Treaty (Ottawa Convention) in September of 2000, recently signed a cooperation agreement for technical assistance with the OAS to conduct a mine action program in Columbia. The President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe, and the Secretary General of the OAS, César Gaviria, signed the agreement on March 5, 2003. The agreement supports a program that will conduct activities such as mine awareness, landmine victim rehabilitation and the implementation of a mine victim database. President Uribe commented that Colombia intended to fulfill its commitment to the Mine Ban Treaty by eliminating its stockpile of AP mines.

OAS: A Catalyst Behind Mine Action and Hemispheric Security

Since 1991, the OAS has developed a variety of strategies in promoting peace and security throughout the Americas. The development of the OAS Mine Action Program (AICMA) has been a part of the movement towards better security in the Western Hemisphere. The AICMA has focused specifically on three activities in its efforts to solve landmine problems in mine-affected countries and to improve hemispheric security: humanitarian demining, stockpile destruction and personal security of the inhabitants of mine-affected zones.

Programs in Central America led by the OAS with financial support from 19 donor countries have cleared more than 1,400,000 square feet of land and destroyed more than 22,000 AP mines. An estimated \$40 million (U.S.) has helped the OAS Program in Central America continue to achieve its mine clearance goals, and just last year, Costa Rica declared itself the first country free of AP mines in the Americas. Technical expertise in mine clearance operations has been provided by the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), which has trained personnel from member countries to conduct mine clearance activities.

In terms of stockpile destruction, the OAS, in collaboration with the IADB and the Canadian government, has been able to destroy more than 500,000 mines located in Honduras, Nicaragua, Ecuador and Peru in just a two-year span (from 2000 to 2002). Subsequently, each of those countries had its stockpile of mines completely destroyed. Again, funding from the international community, particularly Canada and Australia has assisted in stockpile destruction activities for the OAS and its member states.

Another important service that the OAS Mine Action Program has sought to provide for mine-affected countries of its member states is individual security. The OAS has primarily used a combination of three activities, described below, in its efforts to help mine-affected countries:

- **Mine risk education (MRE):** Through a wide range of different communication mediums, the OAS, in conjunction with local and national organizations, provides basic mine risk messages and informs people of the steps to follow in case they find

a mine or piece of UXO.

- **Rehabilitation of victims:** The OAS Mine Victim Rehabilitation Program has provided medical treatment for more than 450 victims of AP mines. In addition, a new program helps victims with job training to help restore their lives after physical and psychological rehabilitation.
- **Remediation of previously mined land:** Assistance from the OAS Program has enabled almost 1,500,000 square feet of land to be safely returned to local populations for agricultural and livestock use.

Through the combination of these different mine action activities, the OAS Mine Action Program continues to approach the security problem posed by landmines with a variety of methods, in order to make the dream of a landmine-free western hemisphere a reality as soon as possible.

Nicaragua Incorporates Misquito Language into New Mine Awareness Campaign

A new campaign for landmine casualty preventive education in Nicaragua started at the end of April. The campaign focuses on the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN). The RAAN is a former misquita battleground where substantial quantities of mines and UXO still exist. The OAS will develop a new dimension in its mine awareness program with new instructive material presented for casualty prevention. In addition, the campaign will employ handicapped victims of AP mines to help run the program.

Argentina and the OAS Sign an Agreement for Stockpile Destruction

On June 9th, the government of Argentina and the OAS signed an agreement of cooperation and technical assistance to execute a project for destroying Argentina's AP mine stockpiles. In the ceremony held during the 33rd ordinary session of the OAS General Assembly, Argentine Foreign Minister Rafael Bielsa stated that approximately 90,000 stockpiled AP mines exist in the country. The Argentine Foreign Minister acknowledged the "experience of the OAS Unit for the Promotion for Democracy, which has a record of success in this area, especially in Central America, a task to which my country has contributed with technical expertise and financial support." OAS Assistant Secretary General Luigi Einaudi referred to the need "to convert the western hemisphere to a landmine-free zone," and he also acknowledged the collaboration of Argentina in this area. Under the project, the OAS will provide technical expertise for landmine stockpile destruction, specialized equipment and financial support with the cooperation of the international donor community.

**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.*

Contact Information

Jamie Perales
Organization of American States
Unit for the Promotion of Democracy
1889 F Street
Washington, DC 20006
Tel: (202) 458-3708
E-mail: jperales@oas.org