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Mine Risk Education: The Effective Way to Save Lives

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Another visitor that Chaela knew was a young boy. This boy was walking to school with his friend when he had the urge to go to the bathroom. Since they were on the road, they thought it was safe to go off the road to relieve himself. He walked two to three meters from the road and stepped on a landmine. The boy stepped on more than three meters from the road and ended up losing his leg. Hearing this story made me realize the need for not only general mine risk education (MRE) but also for detailed education on the specific risks of landmines in a particular area. The boys knew that stepping off the road in an unknown area was dangerous, but they did not know enough about cleared areas to avoid injury.

An Encounter in Caux

The most remarkable experience I had during the Exchange for Peace program as an ethnically Azerbaijan-U.S. citizen and a worker in mine action efforts was an encounter at a peace community near Geneva called Caux. In this community, I had the opportunity to meet a North Korean named Ho Chul Son. Born in Japan and having inherited his North Korean citizenship from his grandfather, this young man traveled to Switzerland with a Japanese NGO worker to speak about his efforts in Japan to establish a friendly Korean-Japanese relationship. Chul is hoping to start a youth camp that brings together and helps to establish relationships between Korean and Japanese teenagers. "The second generation carries too many hurts," he explained in Korean. "We must work with the younger generation to help build a better relationship."

As our conversation continued, we spoke about hopes for Korean reconciliation. My parents immigrated to the United States from South Korea and held a strong distrust of North Koreans. My parents likewise felt isolated and distant from South Koreans. In our respective homes, we were distinctively South and North Korean. In Caux, however, where we were the only ones who spoke Korean, and Korean food and lived a part of Korean culture; we were of one nation. Because of that encounter at Caux, the people of North Korea became less of a factional threat and more of a people to me. I came to a greater understanding of their fears and hopes and gained a greater hope for a better future between our respective motherlands. Ho Chul told me about his one and only meeting with North Koreans. He had told me about his one and only visit to North Korea. There he saw a girl who was around the same age as he, standing guard in uniform at a government building. He timidly approached her to ask, "Is it hard living as a soldier?" She responded easily. "Not at all; that's just how it is."

Conclusion

For the older generation in power, there are a myriad of complicated problems and issues to tackle before any sort of progress is made towards a better world. But for the young, there is only the world as we have known it. Through education, we can easily bypass, "how it is" and work towards "how it can be." We can do this because we do not carry many of the wounds of the past. My encounter with "the enemy" made me think about the debates and verbal confrontations we had at the ICBL, as the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICH), and even by members of the Swiss government in Bern about the United States' refusal to sign the Ottawa Treaty. I knew the United States did not wish to sign the treaty mainly because of its use of landmines at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between the two Koreas. Due to my ties to both the United States and South Korea, I could not help but feel responsible for U.S. use of landmines. I also had difficulty seeing a way out towards peace between the two nations. However, through the Exchange for Peace program, I have found that reconciliation may perhaps start with something as little as a mutual understanding between two young people of opposing ethnicities. I met the "enemies" of my nation face-to-face and unexpectedly found an innocence and youthful hope for peace that sparked and mirrored my own.

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by Musa Jalalov and Vagif Sadigov, MRE Cell, ANAMA

Program Activities

The activities in the frame of the program have been conducted mainly on the basis of the general survey data on suspected mine/UXO areas and interactions with the people involved in 11 war-earm districts of Azerbaijan. The number of mine/UXO victims in surveyed territories since the start of the conflict is estimated to be 1,248. According to the ANAMA Mine Victim Database, 391 people—mainly civilian women and children—became mine/UXO victims since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in May 1994. That was a main reason for making a decision to implement MRE for the civilian population living in frontier and bordering districts.

Fifteen MRE master trainers were trained in February 2001, and they had two refresh training courses, in March and during July to August 2002, with participation of 18 instructors. During September to December 2001, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Education, training gathered 39 three-day training sessions for 508 health personnel, and 59 four-day training sessions for 12 front-line doctors. In September, Agjabadi, Agdash, Agdam, Agh¶rab, Gadjah, Toruz, Terter, Ganxys, Khanlar, Duhok and Sheki—as well as in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Four hundred volunteers from the villages of targeted districts were trained in August 2002 to implement community-based MRE.

An MRE Technical Working Group formed in early 2001, consisting of representatives of several related ministries and other governmental institutions, as well as international and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have played and are playing an active role in implementation and coordination of MRE activities. Training sessions are aimed to disseminate MRE safety messages and safe behavior rules among the population and to train the people working in education and other services through teachers to schoolchildren.

A total of 220,000 MRE brochures for adults and children, 150,000 children's notebooks, 10,000 training manuals and 7,000 T-shirts were produced for the purposes of the program. MRE materials were distributed to health and education departments and civil defense headquarters of the targeted districts as well. Ten sets of mine/UXO models were prepared for Azeri children learn about the dangers of mines through MRE programs. c/o IJCRC

NOTES FROM THE FIELD
Two dead: UXO explosion in scrap metal shop in Baku—June 2, 2003

The incident happened towards evening on June 2nd. All three pieces of UXO were brought from an exploded ammunition depot near Saloglu village of Agbas district. Members of Disabled Soldiers’ Society of Gazakh district provided them as a high-quality scrap metal. To make a profit, they were welded here for delivery to a steel company. Good welders, two refugee men from Armenia, both 35, were hired to handle the UXO. While welding, the ammunition exploded and both died in situ.

It was realized that a lot of UXO remains there. No doubt, the ammunition might explode, possibly claiming new victims.

The OAS and Landmine Victims in Nicaragua

The Organization of American States (OAS) Mine Action Program has established a priority in providing prostheses and medical attention to landmine victims, as well as work training. In 2002, the program started a pilot project that provided job training and jobs to mine victims.

by Carlos Orozco, National Coordinator, OAS Mine Action Program in Nicaragua and Jaime Perales, OAS Communications Specialist

Background

On December 17, 1997, in Nicaragua, Juan Lopez was looking for work on Explosion Mountain. On this day, he stepped on a mine and lost his left leg. He was 29 years old. A year later, the same Mr. Lopez, while he was looking for a small piece of land to work, stepped on a second mine and lost his right leg. Agustín Ramos shared similar circumstances. "I walked into an area where I never imagined mines to be placed," Marling Estrada is a survivor as well. "I was seven years old when I lost my two legs, while I was with my grandmother carrying firewood." José Larrosa: "I received shattered perforations all over my body." Samán Rojas is also a landmine survivor: "A friend and I were trying to get a banana from a tree. My friend died and I lost my left leg." José Blandon describing his injury: "I received a mine blast close to my face. I lost part of my face, my right eye, part of my nose and my upper lip." Juan López, Agustín Ramos, José Blandon and the others supported by the OAS rehabilitation program share similar fates: a loss of a limb or parts of their bodies due to anti-personnel landmines.

The OAS Mine Action Rehabilitation Program was created essentially in response to requests from OAS member countries. The effect of one anti-personnel landmine has devastating consequences not only for the victims, but also for their families. Most victims were their family’s main economic support before the accident.

The lack of knowledge about mines is one of the chief contributors to landmine accidents. For instance, Domingo Martinez told the OAS, "I have 10 mines stockpiled at home in the backyard, for fear that some of them harm anybody." Says Camilo Rivero, "I had a mine in my patio at home and it exploded without anybody touching it." An蛞ero Paul knew of a similar story. She told the OAS that "there are some folks in the Paramas that take out mines and hide them in their homes." Daniel Montiel volunteered to show the OAS mines that are close to a tree. Manuel Perez kept "one mine PPMISIRI and one used rocket LALF" in his home. There are plenty of stories without a name. For example, a 15-year-old youngster found three jumpy mines. He kicked them, there mines at them and moved them close to a road.

Twenty-nine percent of mine accidents happen when people walk through a mined area. Such was the case of Ramon Perez, a 54-year-old farmer. His accident occurred on May 20, 1999. "I was picking corn, I did not know that the field was mined. I stepped on a mine; it exploded and threw me about 30 meters. I was carried to the hospital of Ocotal where they amputated both of my legs." To reduce the risk of accident, the OAS Mine Action Program has embarked on an integrative and extensive education program utilizing radio and television, and in some cases training local leaders. OAS campaigns have identified mines placed in parks and schools, and those stockpiled by individuals in their homes. In a recent campaign in the Suguero area, the participation of the community helped locate more than 400 mines and UXO, which were subsequently destroyed.

With the financial support of Sweden, Norway, Canada and Spain, through the National Center of Prostheses and Orthoses, the OAS supports victims by providing them with prostheses and medical treatment. This was the case of Víctor Bustamante: "[in the Sunga no, Nueva Segovia] I stepped on a mine that exploded, my right leg, and I stumbled to the Ocotal Hospital where my leg was amputated. The OAS gave me the prostheses that I needed." The OAS