The OAS and Landmine Victims in Nicaragua

Carlos Orozco  
Organization of American States (OAS)

Jaime Perales  
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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol7/iss3/36

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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 Sulejewe village of Aghpallar 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 the blast.

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 2003, OAS co-sponsored 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 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," said Agustín Estrada in a survivor's role. "I was seven years old when I lost my two legs, while I was with my grandmother carrying firewood." José Larco: "I received severed perforations all over my body," Sanma Rivas 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 Blasón 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 ear lip." Juan López, Agustín Ramos, José Blasón and the others supported by the OAS rehabilitation program share similar stories. 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 contributance to landmine accidents. For instance, Domingo Martínez told the OAS, "I have 10 mines stocked at home as is risky that mine hit anybody." Says Camilo Rivero, "I had a mine in my patio and it exploded without anybody touching it." Amilfo Pena knew of a similar story. She told the OAS that "there are some folks in the Pampas that take out mines and hide them in their yards." Daniel Montiel volunteered to show the OAS mines that are close to a house, Manuel Perez kept "one mine PDFM36 and one used rocket LALX" in his house. There are plenty of stories without a name. For example, a 13-year-old youngster found three jumping mines. He kicked them, threw them at the wall 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 Pelaza, 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 Ocal where they amputated both of my legs." To reduce the risk of accident, the OAS Mine Action Program has embarked on an integral and extensive education program among the population. The Religious Brotherhood, National and Regional Mine Action NGOs, have been conducting work-training in Guinea, and in some cases training local leaders. OAS campaigns have identified mines placed in parks and schools, and those stocked by individuals in their homes. A recent campaign in the Nicaragua region, the participation of the community helped locate more than 200 mines and UXO, which were subsequently destroyed.

With the financial support of Sweden, the National Center of Prostheses and Orthoses, the OAS supports victims by providing them with prostheses and medical treatment. This was the case of Victor Bustamante: "[In the Sangro, Nueva Segovia] I stepped on a mine that exploded, my right leg. I was carried to the Ocal Hospital where my leg was amputated. The OAS gave me the prostheses that I needed." The OAS

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has been instrumental in helping Albania address its mine action problems. The following article discusses what steps UNICEF—as well as other mine action organizations within Albania—has taken during and after the conflicts in 1999 to help offset landmine concerns of both victims and the general Albanian population.

by Aurora Bushati, Education Project Officer, UNICEF Albania

Introduction

Albania’s mine problem results from the Yugoslav-Romanian conflict of 1999, when landmines were placed along the 120-km border of Albania and the Yugoslav province of Kosovo, and up to one km inside of Albania. During and since the conflict, 48 people have been killed and 376 injured by landmines and UXO incidents.

Four years after the conflict, parts of Albania’s northern border continue to be contaminated with mines and UXO, which are hindering the lives of people in 39 villages of three, prone, isolated and mountainous districts: Kukes, Has and Tropoja. The scattered munitions and landfills are hardland unusable in a region where opportunities for earningoffs incomes are scarce. Poor infrastructure means that a trip into town takes a full day of travel. The difficulty of travel isolates people from one another, and the isolation is worsened by the lack of televisions, electricity and newspapers.

During and Immediately After the War

Almost half a million refugees from Kosovo fled into Albania during the conflict in March 1999, and they stayed there for five months. Spontaneous civil mobilization and substantial resources from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO’s) member states prevented a humanitarian disaster. But the psychological trauma of the war and the disruption of normal childhood had an enormous impact on the young. Based on its human rights approach to working with children, one of UNICEF’s responses was to start the creation of Child-Friendly Spaces, which provided some schooling, a safe play space, and creative activities that distracted children from the reality of the situation and helped them deal with their fears.

As the lead UN agency for mine awareness, UNICEF had a major role to play in warning both indigenous Albanians and refugees about the risk of mines and UXO. The UNICEF multimedia mine awareness campaign included extensive publicity through posters and leaflets at transit points, in refugee camps, at harbour and television stations, and on the front lines, as well as broadcasts, messages on radio and television. To deal with uncertain electricity supplies, the campaign also included distribution of wind-up radios to vulnerable refugees. The campaign included:

• A national mine awareness campaign, launched in July 1999, with the participation of the president and the ministers of Education, Defense and Culture.

• A week of anti-mine activity in September 1999, at the end of which, the Albanian Parliament pledged to ratify the Ottawa Treaty banning landmines. It did so in 2000.

• In collaboration with the Ministry of Defense, deployment of 7,000 mine-mustering signs along the border.

Interventions During 2001–2003

A landmine injury can mean destruction to a family in a rural area where there are no off-farm work alternatives. Since June 2000, the Mine Victims