The Americas: Regional Mine Action Seminar in Peru

During a two-day conference in Lima, Peru, participants reaffirmed their collective commitment and dedication to becoming a hemisphere safe from AP mines.

by Julie Mullen, *MAIC*

Introduction

This summer, the Organization of American States (OAS), along with the governments of Peru and Canada, hosted the Americas Regional Mine Action Seminar. The conference was held in Lima, Peru, on August 14 and 15, 2003. Representatives from countries all over the western hemisphere, as well as many international organizations, gathered to review their effort to rid the hemisphere of AP landmines. The two-day conference was dedicated to learning from each other's experiences, preparing for the Fifth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention that took place in Bangkok, Thailand, in September 2003, as well as supporting and assisting each other in completing the goals set by the individual countries. Through this conference, the region reaffirmed its collective commitment and dedication to becoming a hemisphere safe from AP mines.

Victim Assistance Working Group.
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In his opening remarks, Colonel William A. McDonough, the General Coordinator of the Comprehensive Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines program of the OAS, asked all participants to remember to look ahead to goals their countries envision accomplishing next and the best way to do so, instead of focusing solely on what has already been done. With these goals set, the first day of the conference focused on national and regional planning and priority setting. Country presentations were given by Peru, El Salvador, Chile, Guatemala, Colombia, Suriname, Venezuela, Honduras, Argentina, Nicaragua and Ecuador. Each presentation focused on individual goals, accomplishments, methods used, organizations involved in mine action within each country and progress made toward their collective goals. Organizations such as the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the Mine Action Information Center (MAIC), the Regional Program of Rehabilitation and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) gave informal presentations as well.

An interactive discussion of the different aspects of mine action, such as mine clearance/mine risk education (MRE), victim assistance, destruction of stockpiled mines and information exchange, occupied the second day of the conference. Each discussion was facilitated by two moderators who presented the conclusions of their group's discussion at the end of the day. There was also an MRE puppet show, as well as a speech given by a landmine survivor.

Some of the general topics of the two-day conference included:

- National planning and priority setting.
- The general status and operations of the Ottawa Convention in the Americas.
- The general status and operation of mine action programs in the Americas.
- National goals and progress made toward these goals.
- Regional Planning and Priority Setting
- Possible methods to reinforce and strengthen the role of the OAS in mine action.
- Mobilizing political momentum and commitment.
- The OAS Portfolio as a mechanism for communicating short-term and regional cooperation.
- Resource mobilization
- Building private/public partnerships in order to sustain resources for mine action.
- Mainstreaming mine action into national development initiatives.
- The importance of a National Spokesperson for each country in order to better engage the national authorities.

Conclusion

Closing remarks focused on developing an agreement of regional priorities and goals for 2004. The expertise and experience of each participant made the conference a success. The regional commitment of upholding the Ottawa Convention was reaffirmed and new goals were set to keep the region on the road to becoming a hemisphere safe from mines.

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