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U.S. Humanitarian Demining in Africa

Due to the numerous internal conflicts, crises and wars that several of the nations in Africa have faced, this region is one of the places in the world that is significantly affected by landmines. In an attempt to alleviate the suffering from landmine injuries, the United States has set out to provide humanitarian mine action assistance to many of these afflicted nations.

U.S. Humanitarian Demining Initiatives in Africa

Angola
As a result of more than 30 years of internal political struggle, landmines litter Angola's provinces. The majority of landmines is concentrated in areas necessary for survival, such as agricultural land, roads, bridges, waterways, railways and health care facilities. The actual number of landmines in Angola is unknown, though estimates range up to six million. Aided by the U.S. and other donors, Angolan demining teams have cleared over nine million square meters of land, 841,887 square meters of which in 2001 alone. This cleared land allowed for increased food production and for the resettlement of many internally displaced persons (IDPs). Thanks to contributions from the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID's) Leahy War Victims' Fund (LWVF), Angola has a fully functioning orthopedic workshop that produces prostheses and orthoses so that landmine survivors are able to re-enter society and participate in economic activities. Since 1995, the United States has contributed a total of $25,810,000 to the campaign to remove landmines in Angola.

Chad
The Libyan occupation of the northem-territories of Chad resulted in large (6.60km long) military minefields around key population centers, while rebellions in other regions of the country contributed a large number of smaller minefields to the landmine problem. There are an estimated 500,000 mines in Chad. Along with other donors, the United States played a pivotal role in establishing Chad's demining program. Since 1998, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF)-trained Chadian deminers have cleared 1,322,330 square meters of land, while destroying 3,800 mines and 148,000 pieces of UXO in the process. The United States has given $5,011,855 in aid since 1998 and continues its commitment to demining with a contribution of $611,000 for FY 2002.

Djibouti
Internal conflict between 1991 and 1994 has left Djibouti with an unknown number of landmines and UXO. The U.S. has helped the government of Djibouti create a Mine Action Center and established facilities and demining training with support totaling $2,386,000 since FY 2000. U.S. SOF have been instrumental in training Djiboutian deminers. So far, the Djiboutian demining teams have destroyed 274 landmines and 28 pieces of UXO and cleared 5,661.6 square meters of land, which has been returned to productive use. With the current rate of progress, Djibouti should be able to declare itself mine-safe by the end of 2003.

Eritrea
Civil strife and the war with Ethio- pis have resulted in a severe landmine problem in Eritrea that is concentrated around strategic military positions and around water sources in the more rural provinces. The National Demining Center in Asmara estimates that there are between 1.5 and two million landmines littering the country. In order to help combat this problem, the United States has contributed a total of $10,244,000 since 1994. Currently, Eritrean deminers are clearing an average of 1,826 square meters per week. In addition, mine detection dog teams are averaging 625 square meters per week of area clearance. According to the UN, these operations have permitted refugees to resettle on safe land and spurred economic growth in the region.

Guinea-Bissau
Guinea-Bissau has an estimated 16,000-20,000 landmines, some laid by Serengalese forces, others remaining from the war for independence, but most re- sulting from the 1998-1999 military mu- tiny. Since FY 2000, the United States has been a primary source of assistance, providing a total of $588,145, a signifi- cant portion of that going to the non- governmental organisation (NGO) HUMAID for mine clearance operations.

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The remainder of the funds purchased equipment for Guinea-Bissau's Mine Action Centre, which oversees demining operations. Since January 2000, Guinea-Bissau deminers have cleared more than 183,200 square meters of land and destroyed over 2,400 mines and 990 pieces of UXO. In addition, 2,300 mines and 730 pieces of UXO have been cleared.

Mauritania

Mauritania’s war in the Western Sahara has left between 50,000 and 100,000 landmines on Mauritania’s borders. With unilateral support from the U.S., landmine casualties were reduced significantly. There was only one casualty in 2001. Mauritania deminers have cleared 141,000 square meters of land, destroying more than 8,000 landmines and over 5,700 pieces of UXO in the process. In 2001, with support from the U.S., the Mauritanian government was able to clear 90 kilometers of roadway to permit the transport of goods from the city of Blou to the population of Nouadhibou.

Mozambique

Two decades of war have left Mozambique littered with landmines. Although landmines are found in all of Mozambique’s provinces, there is no reliable estimate of their number or the amount of mine-affected land. The U.S. provided $2,124,000 in FY 2002 and since 1993 has provided $28,825,999 to support mine action in Mozambique. Thanks to the combined efforts of demining organizations, the Mozambican National Demining Institute reported that in 2001 nearly 2 million square meters of land were cleared and 2,727 landmines were destroyed, permitting significant economic development and allowing refugees to resettle on safe land. Presently, the U.S. effort in Mozambique is focused on clearing the Sena rail line, which will allow the export of agricultural and mineral products. Through the LWFE, USAID has supported the production and distribution of prosthetic devices for the estimated 9,000 amputees in the country, most of whom are landmine victims.

Namibia

Namibia declared mine-safe status last year when it completed the clearance of its ten known minefields and 410 electric power pylons. Nevertheless, there are reports that rebel forces of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have crossed over from Angola and have planted mines in the Kavango and Caprivi regions. Namibia has received almost $9 million in U.S. demining assistance since 1994, including $800,000 in FY 2002. Namibia’s 1,135 deminers, trained by U.S. SOF have cleared over 100,000 square meters of land and removed over 5,000 landmines and 1,300 UXO.

Nigeria

Following the explosion of a military ammunition depot in Lagos in January 2002, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) responded by providing a team of Expert Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) experts. The U.S. Department of State has committed over $1,500,000 to provide for an additional period of clearance through its commercial contractors, RONCO Consulting Corporation. By the middle of April 2002, 29,800 pieces of UXO had been cleared from the site and subsequently destroyed.

Senegal

An almost two-decades-long conflict in the Casamance region of Senegal, located in the southwest part of the country, sandwiched between Gambia and Guinea Bissau, has left an unknown number of AP and AT mines in the ground there. These mines have adversely affected the population, agricultural activities and tourism. In July 2001, USAID’s LWFE began providing money to the NGO Handicap International to support its program to assist mine victims in the Casamance, while Save the Children USA believes that an additional 25 mine-related incidents have occurred in these mountains between December 2001 and February 2002.

Sudan

To support the Nuba Mountains Ceasefire Accord the U.S. DOS deployed its Quick Reaction Demining Force to Sudan in April 2002 to conduct mine clearance operations, coordinating its efforts with the UN’s Mine Action Service and the Joint Military Committee (JMC). Clearance operations began in May. The government of Sudan estimates that between 1989 and 2001, 1,135 persons became mine victims in the Nuba Mountains, while Save the Children USA believes that an additional 25 mine-related incidents have occurred in these mountains between December 2001 and February 2002.

Swaziland

Swaziland has one minefield located along its border with Mozambique. Since 1998, the United States has contributed $1,046,000 to assistance. U.S. SOF trained Swazi military forces to conduct demining operations, and the DOS provided funds to procure demining equipment. U.S. humanitarians responding to its need to return to their homes. To continue this effort, the United States is contributing approximately $1.2 million in FY 2002. Since 1995, the U.S. DOS has provided nearly $5.5 million for mine and UXO clearance in Swaziland.

U.S. Humanitarian Demining in Africa

While the government of the Republic of Zambia (CZR) cannot estimate the number of landmines on its territory, it believes land affected by landmines measures approximately 2,500 square kilometers. Zambia is currently in the process of being trained by U.S. SOF in mine risk education and is developing an indigenous humanitarians’ demining capacity. The United States donated approximately $800,000 in FY 2002 to support Zambia’s program. Since the program’s inception in 2001, the U.S. has contributed a total of $1.792,000.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has an estimated 2,500,000 landmines buried within its territory. The U.S. has supported the humanitarians’ demining program in Zimbabwe since 1998 through training and equipment donations. Zimbabwe’s demining program has cleared 800,000 square meters of land, allowing large parts of Victoria Falls to be opened for tourists and the Zambezi Valley to become safe for resettlement. Currently, Zimbabwe’s demining efforts are in the sustainment phase. Since the beginning of the program in 1998, the United States has funded $6,754,000 in an effort to help Zimbabwe rid itself of mines.

Conclusion

Assistance from the United States and other donors to mine-affected African nations has helped to increase the quality of life in these once war-ravaged countries. That assistance has also helped open countless kilometers of road to humanitarian aid organizations to reconstitute infrastructure necessary to sustain economies and to provide holistic health care to thousands of landmine survivors. Their fear has been replaced by hope.

*All photos courtesy of Office of Humanitarian Demining Program.

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