

## Somalia

This issue may be outdated. [Click here](#) to view the most recent issue.

by Sarah B. Talyor, MAIC

### History

Somalia's first known inhabitants were Arabs who established trading posts over 1400 years ago. During the 19th century, Britain, France and Italy colonized the area, and it remained three separate colonies until Britain combined the region under one rule in 1941. This unity was sustained until 1950, when the area once colonized by Italy became a UN territory under Italian rule and was named Somalia. In 1960, the nation finally achieved independence from European rule; however, this newfound liberty brought about many conflicts. Clashes with Ethiopia began in the late 1960s and, for the most part, lasted throughout the late 1980s. Just as peace with Ethiopia was reached, internal conflicts began in 1992 and continue today, even though a transitional government has been established.



### Landmine/UXO Overview

Internal conflict and battles with Ethiopia have left Somalia littered with landmines. They are still in use throughout Somalia today, primarily around military areas, access routes and urban areas. Along with the rival factions, camel herders are also known to utilize landmines in an attempt to stop the cutting of trees that are used for charcoal export, as these trees are a food source for the herders. The location and extent of the landmine problem is unknown, and most stockpiles are thought to be in the hands of private citizens. Some estimate that there are over 1 million landmines scattered throughout Somalia, and this large amount of landmines currently prevents over 200,000 refugees from returning to their native lands of Djibouti and Ethiopia.

### Casualties

It is difficult to find an accurate report of the casualty figures in Somalia; most incidents go unreported. However, the Bay region of central Somalia reported that between 1995 and 2000, 1,281 people were killed (28 of them in 2000) and 1,729 were injured (49 in 2000). Also, in central Somalia, the Bakool region reported 897 deaths (26 in 2000) and 450 injuries (34 in 2000). Finally, in 2000, 101 mine accidents were reported in parts of the northeast, 40 percent of which resulted in death.

### Demining

The Survey Action Center recently conducted an Advance Survey Mission in Somalia, and in March 2001, the transitional government approved a full Landmine Impact Survey. Until this data is collected, the available knowledge is inadequate for demining. In 2000, the Somalia Mine Action Center, which had been operating solely from Somaliland, expanded to Somalia, and in 2001, the Somalia Mine Action Program began

with help from the Department of Demining, Demobilization and Reintegration, the United Nations Development Program's complementing mine action program. Demining was scheduled to begin in October 2001. Unfortunately, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that approximately 50 percent of the mines are non-metallic, making detection even more difficult.

### **Reality Check**

Due to the many conflicts, Somalians suffer from numerous human rights violations including unfair trials, torture and murder. In March 2001, nine humanitarian workers were abducted. Progress is currently being made to improve conditions. As of July 2001, the transitional government was reviewing a mine action policy draft, while also working on a plan to implement the Mine Ban Treaty. In 1998, northeast Somalia established a regional independent administration called Puntland. The president issued a ruling on November 11, 2000, that banned AP landmines; Puntland hopes to make this a law in the near future.

### **Contact Information**

John Dingley  
Somali Civil Protection Program  
Mine Action Advisor  
Hargeisa, Somalia  
Fax: +253-22-5384