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## INTERSOS MAU: Demining Operations and Lessons Learned

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# Demining Operations AND Lessons Learned

by Fernando Termentini [ Technical Director, INTEROS Mine Action Unit ]

## Mine Action Activities

INTEROS' involvement in demining activities originated from its experience in humanitarian operations in post-war contexts, during which it confronted a large number of mine casualties and severe constraints to the restart of socio-economic life due to mine contamination.

Therefore, INTEROS decided to get involved directly in the mine action efforts of the international community, establishing in 1997 the Mine Action Unit (MAU) on a permanent basis.

The MAU operates in all the main mine action sub-sectors, including the following:

1. Mine clearance.
2. Mine risk education.
3. Victim assistance.
4. Advocacy.
5. Training.

The Unit is accredited by the mine action centres (MACs) in the countries of operation and operates according to internationally agreed standards. The MAU regularly holds its own training courses—including both humanitarian and technical aspects—for international and local personnel in Italy and in its countries of operation.

In order to support the Rapid Reaction Operations worldwide, INTEROS MAU established its own Logistic Base within the U.N. Humanitarian Response Depot in Brindisi, Italy. From Brindisi, quick-response operations for explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), battle area clearance (BAC) and survey can be launched for deployment on short notice worldwide.

## Mine Clearance

**Bosnia.** In Bosnia, INTEROS MAU implemented a number of mine clearance actions in Sarajevo and Tuzla cantons in connection with the return of refugees and the reconstruction of houses and public services (schools, health centres and markets). Funds were provided by the European Commission (EC), the Italian government, Italian local administrations and Italian trade unions, as well as by INTEROS private donors.

In 1999, the MAU cleared more than 30,000 square metres (0.01 square mile) and built a new market in the Stup's area of the suburbs of Sarajevo. In 2002, the MAU implemented a mine clearance operation in the industrial complex, the Metal and Mechanical Automobiles Factory of

Sarajevo (FAMOS), to contribute to the development of production activities. The intervention was co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is now complete. INTEROS MAU is currently facilitating the resumption of tourist and sport activities. The MAU is ending a project aimed at the clearance of Trebenic area, in particular the bobsled track utilized during the last Olympic Games in Sarajevo.

**Angola.** Since 1997, INTEROS MAU has been operative in the southern regions of Huíla and Cuando Cubango. From 1999 to 2001, a mine action project, funded by the EC and the Italian government, was implemented in support of internally displaced persons' (IDPs) return and resettlement in Huíla province. A large number of tasks, including EOD, BAC operations, UXO demolitions, and Level 1 and Level 2 Surveys, have been implemented in Cuando Cubango and Huíla provinces.

Since 2003, the MAU has been implementing a project to improve the humanitarian situation in favour of the peace process by supporting the demobilization of ex-combatants, and the return and reintegration process of IDPs and refugees in Huíla province. In addition to the projects still ongoing, the MAU is conducting the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) in Huíla and Namibe provinces in coordination with the Survey Action Center.

**Kosovo.** A large clearance program was implemented from mid-1999 to December 2001 in support of the consolidation of peace and the restart of economic and social activities. In full integration with U.N. Mission in Kosovo Mine Action Coordination Center (UNMIK MACC) planning and coordination, INTEROS activity was initially focused on clearing houses and public service buildings in the Pec/Peja, Klina and Istok districts funded by European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and the Italian government. Tasks have been progressively enlarged to minefield clearance and employing local personnel specifically trained by INTEROS.

Starting in the summer of 2000, the MAU was charged by the Pristina UNMACC to perform a clearance project specifically addressing cluster bomb units (CBUs), including identification of areas contaminated by cluster munitions, area reduction, Level 2 Surveys and clearance operations. The activities were funded by the International Trust Fund for Demining and Victims Assistance (ITF) of Slovenia, the U.N. Office of Project Services (UNOPS) and the European Agency for Reconstruction.

**Serbia.** ITF entrusted INTEROS MAU to implement an assessment of the mine/UXO problem in the two republics of Serbia and Montenegro. A large presence of CBUs was regis-

tered, calling for massive and urgent clearance operations. A project proposal has been submitted to various donors.

**Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.** With EC funding, the MAU implemented a rapid-reaction mine clearance operation in support of a housing and reconstruction programme. The project was focused on the municipalities along the northern border with Kosovo to allow the return of refugees and IDPs. More than 700 houses and their immediate surroundings were cleared from September 2001 to March 2002.

**Afghanistan.** With EC funding, rapid-reaction operations started. The project aims to reduce the mine/UXO threat—especially CBUs and other UXO dropped by the Coalition bombing—to allow the essential mobility of the humanitarian response and to enable a quick start of reconstruction efforts. EOD and BAC teams have been established jointly with the Afghan non-governmental organization (NGO) Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC) for clearance operation in the Kabul, Jalalabad and Herat regions. Additionally, since 2003, INTEROS MAU has been involved in the frame of the Road Reconstruction Project, a technical support project for ATC funded by the EC.

**Iraq.** The MAU has completed a six-month emergency project in support of humanitarian and relief operations through survey, marking and clearance of hazardous areas, as well as related mine risk education (MRE) activities in the southern governorates; it employs two Rapid Reaction Teams of 15 persons each. The project, funded by ECHO, started in May 2003 with the aim of allowing the deployment of humanitarian agencies and the implementation of relief activities. It also aims to make safe priority areas available for humanitarian work, as well as for social and economic activities of the local population. Currently, Iraq activities are on standby for security reasons; activities will probably resume in Nassirjza district in May 2005 for vocational training and capacity building of a local NGO.

## Mine Risk Education

MRE is a key instrument in all INTEROS projects as a preventive measure to decrease the number of mine casualties. A wide range of actions is implemented at the field level, in accordance with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) guidelines, including MRE sessions in schools, refugee camps and community centres, as well as TV and radio broadcasting, leaflet and poster distribution, etc.

**Bosnia.** The MAU launched its first mine awareness campaign jointly with the demining operations in 1996. From March to May 2004, INTEROS MAU, in cooperation with the Universities of Sarajevo and Rome and with the

Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) trade unions, implemented a sociological research project aimed at identifying attitudes and practices of the populations more at risk in relation to the mine problem. A further intervention in six municipalities, based on the research results, is ongoing in order to create a network of MRE focal points properly trained to spread MRE messages. The project will last one year and is funded by UNICEF.

**Kosovo.** INTERSOS MAU has undertaken MRE activities in direct connection with clearance operations. Six local operators were trained (following UNICEF guidelines) and employed for informational sessions to be given to the owners of the houses under clearance and in schools and social centers. From 1999 to 2001, more than 15,000 Kosovars were educated about the risk of mines.

**Pakistan.** A project supporting Afghan refugees living in camps along the border was carried out from January 2002 to June 2003 with funding from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. The project aimed to raise awareness and to educate people about the mine/UXO and CBU risk before their repatriation to Afghanistan. A team of six local operators was trained for this purpose. Sessions were held along with the community services activities in refugee camps. Posters and leaflets were produced and distributed.

**Angola.** INTERSOS MAU set up MRE activities in partnership with the local NGO *Club de Jovens*, created and accredited by UNICEF. From October 2003 to April 2004, a community-based MRE project, funded by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, was carried out in Huíla province using a participatory approach (interactive theatre, capoeira, etc.) to involve the communities. A network of 40 MRE focal points was created to collect and spread mine/UXO information.

In May 2004, INTERSOS started MRE activities for returnees in the transit centres in Cuando Cubango and Huíla provinces. In 2005, the MAU will try to start a new community-based MRE program in Cuando Cubango aimed at creating a set of experimental participatory tools for the assessment and analysis of mine/UXO risky behaviours.

**Afghanistan.** Since March 2003, INTERSOS MAU has made an MRE consultant available to the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan in order to provide capacity-building activities and guidance to the Monitoring, Evaluation and Training Agency, a local NGO, and to the U.N. Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (UN MAPA), both partners for MRE. INTERSOS' contribution has been mainly focused on the development of the community-based MRE training package for national and international NGOs and for community volunteers, and on drafting MRE monitoring and evaluation guidelines and tools for the UN MAPA.

**Iraq.** Community-based MRE activities started in March 2003 in the area around Basrah.

INTERMINE is an international non-profit humanitarian organization committed to assisting the victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts. It is an independent organization created to provide an effective response to crisis situations in the poorest regions of the world. INTERMINE has its central headquarters in Rome (in charge of planning and coordinating operations) and field offices located in countries of operation. Its projects cover humanitarian needs such as water and sanitation, education, infrastructure, repatriation/resettlement, and mine action.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VALENTINA CRINI

An AP mine has been located in a BiH minefield.

MRE public information and dissemination started in August 2003 in the transit centre of the southern governorate of Basrah. Four MRE facilitators were trained for mine risk information sessions in the transit centre. Specific MRE tools have been created including a 20-minute MRE cartoon for children.

### Victim Assistance

In Angola, INTERSOS is implementing a project supporting a centre for prosthetics and rehabilitation of landmine victims in Cuando Cubango province. This area is heavily affected by fighting and landmine contamination, and the Centre is the only form of assistance for mine victims in the province. The project includes train-

ing local personnel in rehabilitation activities and prosthesis production. Specific attention is paid to the social and economic reintegration of the disabled through vocational training.

### Advocacy

INTERMINE is a member of the board of directors of the Italian Campaign to Ban Landmines (ItCBL), the national section of the Nobel Prize-winning International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Together with ItCBL, INTERMINE supported the approval of the Italian law n.374/97 against use and proliferation of landmines, the law n.106/99 for the ratification by the Italian government of the Ottawa

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Convention, as well as the new special law n.58/01 for mine action funding. INTERSOS MAU, the ItCBL and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs promoted the creation of a National Committee for Mine Action by gathering governmental and non-governmental actors involved in mine action.

**Training**

In order to better prepare experts for the activities of mine clearance, INTERSOS has organised four courses for project managers and technical supervisors on principles and techniques of humanitarian mine clearance operations according to UNMAS standards.

The first course, held in 1997, was a residential course of two weeks aimed at integrating basic technical knowledge with the specific approach of humanitarian interventions and was formed by four modules: the humanitarian system, the context of operations, collaborations and relationships, and technical aspects. In February 2001, a second course was organised, with a theoretical part in Italy and practical training in the field, according to a programme defined on the basis of U.N. guidelines. The third course took place in May 2002 and trained about 20 people with previous technical experience for the specific context of humanitarian mine clearance operations. The

fourth course was organised in October 2004 and aimed to train project managers, technical supervisors and mine risk educators for humanitarian mine action activities according to the U.N. guidelines.

**Lessons Learned**

After eight years of activity, INTERSOS has gained precious and valuable experience in the mine action sector. The following are some suggested considerations for future mine action activities:

1. Recent wars (in particular the Afghan and Iraqi ones) have confirmed that, in most cases, the real threat is represented by explosive remnants of war (ERW). We can say that 30 percent of the general danger is represented by mines, while 60 percent is by UXO and the last 10 percent by booby traps and others. The danger of CBUs is greater than that of AP mines, since they can explode at the slightest touch with terrible effects and they attract the interest of people selling explosives and metal.
2. If national economic resources are limited by the presence of UXO and mines, then it is necessary to clear them immediately, but a lot of time and economic resources are needed to do so; therefore, we think that in the next few years it will be necessary to prioritize available resources to conduct Technical Surveys,

which together with the LIS results can allow rapid interventions of area reduction and marking for future systematic clearance activities. In this way, large countries like Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan will get sufficient territorial resources to restart economic activities.

3. It is important for the international community to have available a rapid-reaction mechanism to better guarantee immediate interventions after conflict, in order to eradicate the dangerous ERW for the benefit of the local population and of all the people working in the field.
4. It is fundamental that all these activities are integrated with MRE activities for the at-risk population (people particularly at risk, such as workers—peasants, fishers and shepherds—who often directly face the threat of ERW). ♦

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that the mine problem could be solved, provided that civil society and governments worked together towards that goal. In some cases, its fieldwork generated strong civil-society initiatives in mine-affected countries, calling for a total ban on landmines. In Mozambique in 1994, for instance, HI collected 100,000 signatures to promote a ban on landmines together with associations of Mozambican veterans and people with disabilities. Also in Afghanistan in April 1996, together with landmine survivors, Afghan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations, HI organized a major demonstration calling on the Taliban regime to stop using anti-personnel landmines. This demonstration was the first in 19 years in Kandahar; it took place while diplomats were meeting at a Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) session.

The continuum between advocacy and fieldwork took on a new dimension with the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention in March 1999. The emergence of an international norm banning the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of anti-personnel mines provided an extraordinary framework for HI's work, both in the field and at the international level. While

Article 6 of the Ottawa Convention generated resources for HI's field programs, HI could also start pressuring states to comply with the new norm. HI's involvement in the creation and governance of the *Landmine Monitor* system, together with a relentless effort to support universalization and implementation of the Ottawa Convention, even by non-signatories, was a source of major satisfaction for the organization.

**Resolutions**

Combining international advocacy with mine action in the field can be tricky, though; for instance, what is HI to do when it learns that landmines are used (or even produced) in a country in which it is working? How should it cooperate with states that have not joined the Ottawa Convention, such as Laos, North Korea or the United States? What should HI do when a national legislation complying with Article 9 of the Ottawa Convention leads to a ban of clearance by villagers? How should HI promote Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention, while still concentrating its clearance efforts on priority areas?

So far, HI has sought to resolve these questions by looking back at the reason the organization was created: the provision of an appropriate

response to the needs of people with disabilities. Providing such response required pragmatism as well as a strong view of the organization's role and mandate. Questions still remain and are generally solved by dialogue, cooperation and careful listening to the needs of mine-affected communities.

Responding to the needs of people with disabilities is the reason HI was created 23 years ago. Responding to such needs in 2005 is more complicated than it was in 1995, because of the growing bureaucratization of mine action. During this 10-year period, though, HI has discovered that the mine and UXO problem can be solved, provided that the needs of mine-affected communities are the primary focus of the mine action community. ♦

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**Errata:** A country profile on Peru in issue 8.2 of the *Journal of Mine Action* (winter 2004) stated that the Organization of American States (OAS) reported 179 landmine casualties since 1995. The OAS did not collect this information. The Peruvian Anti-Personnel Mine Action Center confirms that there have been 302 recorded landmine casualties and 90 UXO injuries in Peru from 1992 to 2005. They also confirm the following: in 2001, two civilians were injured in a landmine incident at an electrical tower; in 2002 there were 12 people harmed in mine-related incidents and 19 people harmed in UXO-related accidents; and in 2003, 14 people were reportedly injured in mine-related incidents. The Peruvian army completed 28 demining objectives in Tumbes (19) and Piura (nine) along the northern border. From 2003 to 2004, the Peru National Police Force's Division of Countermine Security and the Naval Industrial Services were able to clear 43,000 mines around electrical towers.