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Today, Ethiopia and Eritrea are two separate countries with individual governments and distinctly different mine action programs. So why, then, are they consistently grouped together when discussing mine action? Phil Lewis, Program Manager of United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center (UNMEE MACC), explains that “historically, the ties between these two countries have always been very close. It is thus not surprising that the countries are consistently grouped together even when talking about mine action; however, ... it is critical to keep in mind that each country has its own idiosyncrasies that explain and impact the history and current status of its country’s landmine problem.”¹ To understand fully the similarities and differences of Ethiopian and Eritrean mine action, their conflict and mine impact history must be considered.

Background

According to Teklewold Mengesha, Director of the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO), “Ethiopia has a significant mine problem and ranks among the top 10 most affected countries in the world.”² Ethiopia is a country devastated by years of conflicts and wars. The mine/UXO problem in Ethiopia is a direct result of these conflicts. The history of mine/UXO impact in the country can be traced back to 1935 with the Italian invasion during World War II, and subsequent occupation until 1941.³ Colonized by the Italians in 1889, Eritrea became a battlefield for Italian and British forces during this time as well, leaving behind massive amounts of UXO.

After 11 years of British administration, Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia in 1952.⁴ In 1962, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea, which led to a long, exhaustive struggle for independence that lasted for 32 years and caused massive amounts of

mine/UXO contamination in both countries. Lejla Susic, Mine Risk Education Coordinator for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Eritrea, explains the impact of the war: “The conflict resulted in considerable UXO contamination and the laying of numerous non-conventional minefields.”⁵

During the civil war, Ethiopia also engaged in other conflicts. From 1977 to 1978, the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia took place, and in 1980, Ethiopia engaged in a border war with Sudan.

Eritrea gained formal independence from Ethiopia in 1993. Soon after independence was gained, disagreements over border demarcation led to the most recent conflict between the two countries that lasted from 1998 to 2000. Eritrean forces emplaced an estimated 240,000 mines and Ethiopian forces laid an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 mines.⁶ Susic explains that the conflict “was characterized by trench warfare and the laying of defensive minefields by both armies along the 1,000-kilometer [621.37-mile] border.”⁵

The current mine/UXO contamination is a result of the separate and conjoined history of war and conflict of both countries, especially the most recent conflict. The United Nations established the UNMEE MACC in 2000 to address the mine/UXO contamination problem.

Coordination and Progress

UNMEE MACC. The UNMEE MACC was primarily set up to operate in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), a 25-kilometer (15.53-mile) buffer zone that encompasses the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and adjacent areas. Each country maintains its own national mine action program and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) projects, so the UNMEE MACC serves more for support and clearance in disputed, highly mined territory.

The UNMEE MACC has made extensive progress since its program’s establishment just four years ago. In 2002, the UNMEE MACC restructured due to a change in Eritrean government policy regarding mine action and established an integrated military/civilian mine action structure called the Joint Mine Action Coordination Center. Through this approach, the UNMEE MACC has destroyed 7,150 mines and 51,000 pieces of UXO to date. It has also cleared 52,500,000 square meters (20.27 square miles) of land and 10,500 kilometers (6,524.40 miles) of roads.¹

In addition to mine/UXO clearance, the UNMEE MACC also conducts mine risk education (MRE) in the TSZ. The MACC is responsible for three MRE teams that provide assistance and education to communities located inside the TSZ in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. The program has proven effective through the decrease of incidents. Each team serves approximately 2,500 people each month. The UNMEE MACC has delivered MRE to approximately 268,000 people in the TSZ since its establishment in 2000.¹

EDA. In Eritrea, the most recently established national demining agency is the Eritrean Demining Authority (EDA). The EDA, which establishes mine action policy and regulation, works in conjunction with the Eritrean Demining Operations (EDO), a local non-governmental organization (NGO) for mine action. Both agencies were established in July 2002 when the government decided to implement major structural changes to mine action within Eritrea. According to Susic, the structural changes “disbanded the existing national mine action bodies and replaced them. ... Most mine action activities were suspended.”⁵ At that time, the Eritrean government also dispelled nearly all demining NGOs working in the country. After the 2002 decision, UNDP began assisting the newly formed authorities in all areas of mine action, including demining, victim assistance (VA) and MRE. After a year of reorganization, the EDA and EDO became truly operational in 2003.

Eritrea, one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, is severely affected by mine/UXO contamination.⁵ According to the recent Landmine Impact Survey, “It is now known that every region of the country is impacted by mines, the most serious contamination occurring in provinces bordering Ethiopia and the northeastern portion of the country.”⁶ The problem is compounded further by the fact that during the recent border conflict, a good portion of the mines were laid in the most agriculturally fertile land and highest populated areas in the entire country.

Because the EDA and EDO did not become fully operational until 2003, mine/UXO clearance is still somewhat lagging. The EDO has five manual clearance teams with two EDA EDO teams trained, accredited and deployed. The most recent clearance rate of 3.6 square kilometers (1.39 square miles) per year, according to Susic, “will have to be increased at least threefold in order to respond to the problem in a reasonable timeframe.”⁵ RONCO Consulting Corporation, a commercial firm under contract to the U.S. Department of State as part of the U.S. government’s extensive mine action assistance program, has recently partnered with the EDO, supplying two clearance teams and 18 mine detection dogs (MDDs).

MRE in Eritrea is conducted through a partnership between the EDO and UNICEF. This partnership created six MRE teams which, in 2004, targeted 97,732 people. The EDO/

UNICEF MRE partnership has taken a wide-ranging approach to MRE through community-based, school-based and media outreach. Some of these activities include training community volunteers, integrating MRE into primary school curricula, and targeting both children and adults with MRE radio shows.

In terms of VA, Eritrea is still severely lacking. The LIS identified “a total of 5,385 mine casualties, including 3,152 people killed and 2,233 injured.”⁶ The *Landmine Monitor Report 2004* states that “the healthcare infrastructure in Eritrea is unable to adequately assist the large number of war-disabled, including mine survivors.”⁶ While 94 percent of victims received emergency care, only 3 percent have received long-term rehabilitation assistance according to the LIS. Despite these discouraging statistics, the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare directs a community-based rehabilitation (CBR) program. The CBR program has served a total of 41,209 people in approximately 40 percent of the country as of March 2004.⁶

EMAO. The recent LIS reveals that “1.9 million people live in 1,492 landmine-impacted communities, containing 1,916 suspected hazardous areas.”² Approximately 700 million square meters (270.27 square miles) of land in the country are now agriculturally unproductive due to the landmine problem.² In light of the seriousness of the mine/UXO problem, the government of Ethiopia created the EMAO in February 2001.

Prior to the EMAO’s establishment, the Ethiopian Demining Project (EDP), administered by Ethiopia’s Ministry of Defense, conducted all humanitarian demining and cleared a total of 17,000 square meters (20,331.83 square yards) of land by 1998.² Soon after, two companies of the Ethiopian army were released and transferred to the EMAO. These companies were trained by technical advisers from RONCO and began demining operations in mid-2002. In 2003, Norwegian People’s Aid established a humanitarian mine action operation in the country through its cooperative proposal with EMAO to integrate use of MDDs, mechanical mine clearance machines and Rapid Response Teams. As of February 2004, the EMAO has destroyed 767 anti-personnel mines, 77 anti-vehicle mines, and 9,853 pieces of UXO and has cleared a total of 4.6 million square meters (1.78 square miles) of land.²

Several organizations have conducted MRE in Ethiopia. The Rehabilitation and Development Organization (RaDO), with financial and technical assistance from UNICEF, created an MRE program in Tigray in 1999, extending it to Afar in 2001. By 2004, a total of 1,100,469 people had received MRE from RaDO through community-based, school-based and religion-based initiatives. UNICEF currently funds the EMAO MRE program, which trains community liaisons to work directly with demining forces. From 2001 to 2003, more than 1.3 million people received MRE in Ethiopia through various programs.²

The LIS for Ethiopia recorded a total of 16,616 mine/UXO casualties; 75 percent of recent incidents occurred during herding or farming. VA in Ethiopia is virtually non-existent. Due to the low number of hospitals able to perform emergency surgery, only 48 percent of recent survivors received emergency medical care. Primary support to VA in Ethiopia comes from the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs coordinates all VA in the country.²

A Look to the Future

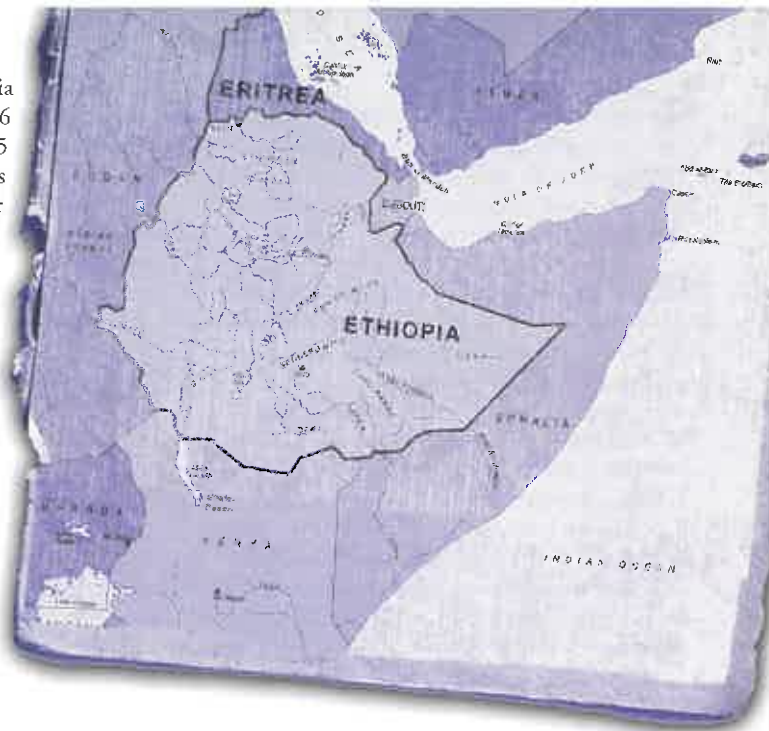
Since their border conflict ended in 2000, both Eritrea and Ethiopia have turned their attention to the landmine problem consuming their countries. The recent conflict also brought awareness to the international community. All three programs—UNMEE, the EDA and the EMAO—have accomplished a great deal in the short amount of time since the war by establishing new programs, revamping old programs, utilizing new technology and receiving support from international sources. The national mine action programs of both countries have ambitious and forthright goals for the coming months and years.

In Eritrea, the government has created a national mine action strategy for 2005–2009, based upon its wish for national ownership of mine action. Some objectives of this plan include the following:

- Conducting all aspects of mine action in order to permit the return of 65,000 internally displaced persons by the end of 2006.
- Completing mine clearance.
- Integrating MRE and VA in remaining high- and medium-impact areas by 2009.
- Continuing to conduct MRE, particularly in schools and vulnerable communities in order to reduce casualties.
- Developing a VA system that will address the needs of both past and recent victims.⁸

In Ethiopia, long-term goals established by EMAO involve “plans to expand its operational capability to coordinate and implement mine action activities countrywide. This includes the mobilization of additional clearance and MRE capacities as well as the formation of new partnerships with international and national implementing partners to achieve the national mine-action strategy objectives.”⁷

As of the time of writing, the two countries were still suffering from a stalemate as a result of a disagreement regarding the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission’s 2002 ruling, which



demarcated the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. According to the United Nations, “the ongoing stalemate could spark another conflict.”⁹ Thirty people have been killed by recently planted mines to date,¹⁰ and both the Eritrean and Ethiopian national armies continue to face each other across a 25-kilometer-wide (15.53 miles) demilitarized zone that is patrolled by 3,300 U.N. peacekeepers. In December 2004, Ethiopia moved an additional 40,000 troops towards the border,¹¹ and in April 2005, two armed clashes broke out there; the incidents are currently being investigated.⁹ Although tensions are still high between the two countries, both Ethiopia and Eritrea hope to continue their demining efforts working towards the goals set forth in their national mine action strategies. ♦

See “References and Endnotes” on page 107

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