

Honduras

History

Nestled among Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua, Honduras is a tropical paradise of rainforests, clear waters and fresh fruit. The small country has Mayan roots that date at least as far as 1000 B.C. to the Copan city-state, which was abandoned around A.D. 900. The area remained quiet until Columbus arrived in 1502. The Spanish settled in Honduras in 1525 and maintained control until Dutch pirates took possession in 1643. The Spanish resettled in 1787, and in 1821, Honduras resisted control from Spain. After a conflict between conservatives and liberals, Honduras broke from Mexico and became its own state in 1838. Tensions rose in 1906 between Honduras and Nicaragua over a stretch of land on the Mosquito Coast and worsened after Honduras and Colombia signed the Caribbean Sea Maritime Limits Treaty in 1986. After a ratification of the treaty in 1999, Nicaragua became upset with Honduras, claiming Honduras had no right to the territory, an area rich in resources such as petroleum and fish. Members from both sides signed an agreement on March 16, 2001, that eased the dispute.

Landmines/UXO Overview

In the 1980s, landmines were planted during the Nicaragua conflict on the Nicaragua/Honduras border. Although it is unclear how many were initially laid, more than 2,000 mines—both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle—have been cleared and destroyed from the Honduras side since then. In 2001, Honduras identified four departments of contamination: Choluteca, Cortes, El Paraíso and Olancho. Honduras has never produced or exported anti-personnel landmines but received mines from Nicaragua.

Casualties

The last mine-related accident occurred on March 18, 2001, when a Honduran civilian lost a leg and an eye in

an attempt to cross the border into Nicaragua to hunt. Officials estimate that about 200 civilians were killed in mine-related accidents between 1990 and 1995. Various programs have been implemented to aid victims by providing prostheses. The San Felipe General Hospital and Handicap International Belgium (HIB) are two resources for those in need. Honduras has laws to protect the rights of disabled citizens.

Demining

In November 2000, Honduras destroyed 7,441 stockpiled landmines while retaining 826 mines for training purposes. In August of 2002, Honduras returned 63 mines to the army of Nicaragua. The mines were originally received by Honduras for training mine detection dogs (MDDs) but were never used. Also in 2002, a total of 16,700 square meters of mine-affected land was cleared, and in the process, 20 landmines and two pieces of UXO were destroyed. In 2003, the program in Honduras employed 70 deminers trained by the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB): 30 support soldiers, four MDDs and a team of five international supervisors to help in the effort. Under supervision of the Organization of American States (OAS) and IADB, the United States has been supporting demining operations in Honduras since 1993. This operational and logistical support has trained teams that cleared over 430,000 square meters of land as of September 30, 2003. In addition, Taiwan donated \$294,000 (U.S.) in order to clear 49,250 square meters, allowing for the return of 260 displaced peasant families. Mine clearance in Las Canoas and Santa Catalina was completed on May 12, 2003, and that same month, the last clearance operation started in San José de la Lodosa.

As of October 29, 2004, Honduras is “mine-free,” as declared by the government of Honduras. This declaration was made possible by the efforts of Honduran



deminers who cleared 2,191 landmines, 214 pieces of UXO and 60,521 other war remnants. The government estimates that more than 67,000 families will move into the 1,479-square-kilometer cleared area to farm.

Reality Check

Speedy mine removal has been hampered by the wake of destruction from Hurricane Mitch, which ravaged the country in 1998. Mines buried 25–40 cm deep shifted location during the storm, so special equipment was required to combat mine detection issues. Because of such difficulties, the United States government, which has provided assistance to mine clearance in Honduras, prefers to use the term “mine-safe,” which indicates that “the most pressing humanitarian impacts of the landmines have been addressed, without asserting the impossible guarantee that each and every landmine has been removed.”

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