

Geneva Diary: Report from the GICHD

The GICHD has been assisting the ICRC with technical information on both AT mines and submunitions. GICHD also addresses other areas of special concern to mine action.

by P. M. Blagden, Technical Director, GICHD

Explosive Remnants of War

Among the many hazards encountered by deminers worldwide are the various unexploded munitions left on the battlefield, in storehouses and bunkers, and even in the villages and homes of local participants in internal conflicts. These have always been accepted as part of the deminer's clearance task, and most munitions can be disposed of fairly simply. These Explosive

Remnants of War (ERW) are neither covered by the Mine Ban Treaty, nor by the Amended Protocol II of the Inhumane Weapons Convention (known as the CCW). Explosive remnants can pose a significant clearance burden—in the British Clearance Sector in Kuwait, for instance, there were an estimated 16,000 tons of material that either had to be moved into proper storage areas or disposed of. Recent unwelcome additions to the range of ERW have been the explosive submunitions or bomblets. First used extensively in the Vietnam War, some types are more

sensitive than many other munitions and, according to ICRC figures, were responsible for as many deaths and injuries in Kosovo as were AP mines (16 percent).

In 1999, the ICRC took the initiative to examine the feasibility of establishing a new Protocol under the CCW to cover ERW, and this move has met with widespread international endorsement. The Geneva International Center For Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) has been assisting the ICRC with technical information, both on AT mines and on submunitions. The GICHD has special concerns in a number of areas, all highly significant to demining groups.

■ Fuel Air Munition, a never before seen munition, hindered mine removal in Kuwait. c/o GICHD



INFORMATION ON EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR NEEDED BY MINE/UXO ACTION ORGANISATIONS

Information Type	Use in Mine Clearance	Use in Mine/UXO Awareness
~Types of mines and munitions used (e.g., source of supply, age and original shelf-life).	~Needed to prepare demining "toolkit", including tools to remove fuses, making safe, etc.	~Mine/UXO recognition by population. ~Training for awareness trainers.
~Dimensions and visual characteristics of mines and munitions used (e.g., size, shape and marking).	~Needed to recognize mines and munitions during survey and clearance.	~Development of support materials and media.
~Dimensions and visual characteristics of packaging or transporting material.	~Needed for recognition of likely mined areas or munition strike zones.	
~Location information for mine fields (as per CCW Protocol II)	~Mine field maps, laying patterns and depth info needed for mine survey and clearance.	~Information on dangerous areas for population. ~Training for awareness trainers.
~For air-, gun- or rocket-delivered submunitions or conventional bombs, details of the munition (e.g., type, fusing and warhead), delivery direction, drop height and target area.	~Needed by clearance teams to estimate of the likely spread of sub-munitions.	~Development of support materials and media. ~Better targeting where mine/UXO awareness is needed.
~For air- or rocket-delivered submunitions, details of delivery canisters, including markings.	~Needed for recognition by clearance teams to indicate types of sub-munitions released.	
~Details of any anti-disturbance or anti-handling devices, any self-destruct or self-neutralisation systems (e.g., munition "life" and active period).	~Needed for safety of clearance teams to estimate safety of movement, disarming or destruction.	~Training for awareness trainers.
~Details of all munition propellants (e.g., nature—solid or liquid and composition).	~Needed for safety of survey and clearance teams to establish method of clearance and destruction.	Not needed
~For fuel-air explosives (FAE), details of the explosive composition.	~Needed by clearance teams to estimate of handling and disposal hazards.	Not needed

Middle East

GICHD Brief Facts and Figures

Established: April 1998

Started: May 1999

Current staff: 24

Three main functions:

- Support the MBT
- Support field operations, including IMSMA
- Carry out enabling studies

The major concern is that information on all types of munitions, including submunitions, is made available to demining groups before they have to start the clearance operation. This information was not provided at the start of the Kuwait operation, which added an unnecessary danger to the deminers. A number of munitions had never been seen before by any of the teams working in the area, which added to the hazards of their removal. At a recent workshop, the GICHD prepared a table of deminer's requirements for information, which is reproduced on the previous page. We firmly believe that deminers have the right to know the nature of the ERW they are called upon to clear.

Another concern is that the arming systems of all munitions are made as simple and foolproof as possible. Self-destruct mechanisms that fail to function leave potentially lethal submunitions with an unknown active life, dangerous to both the deminers and the local population. The GICHD has made some technical suggestions on self-destruct

mechanisms.

Although the safe storage of ERW is not the subject of any protocol or treaty requirement, it is vital that national governments that are left with stocks of unused munitions know how to store these munitions in a safe way. Careless storage has led to major fires and explosions in storage areas. In one case, a storage facility burned for eight hours, flinging burnt and half-burnt material over a five-km radius. This not only represents a major hazard to local villages, but also presents a further clearance problem, as many of the ejected munitions will still be live and possibly even more sensitive than before. The GICHD has knowledge of correct methods of ammunition storage where required, both under regular and emergency conditions.

GICHD Activities in the Middle East

The GICHD has perhaps fewer links with the Middle East than with other parts of the demining world. That said, IMSMA has been installed in Eritrea, Yemen, Somalia, and Lebanon, and a recent International Standards outreach session was held for the Middle East, which was attended by representatives from Eritrea, Lebanon, Northern Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. The GICHD also has contacts with the programs in Afghanistan, although the dog-training program in that country is now on hold until further notice.

Brief Updates

Support for the Mine Ban Treaty

At the Third Meeting of States

Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty in Managua in September, the GICHD was given an expanded mandate to give greater support to the Convention and its Intersessional Standing Committees through the formation of an Implementation Support Unit (ISU). This Unit will increase the flexibility and efficiency of the work done by and for the co-chairs of the Standing Committees. The ISU will be formed at the end of this year.

International Standards

The first tranche of 28 International Standards (IMAS) was officially endorsed by the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action on 26 September, and six IMASs have been translated into French. Full details are available at www.mineclearancestandards.org. The final outreach session of the IMAS program took place in Cambodia in early October. This brings the total number of country programs briefed to 29. Nearly 300 people have received instruction on IMAS, coming mainly from National Mine Action Authorities, Mine Action Centres and NGOs. ■

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