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History

A mountainous land-locked country, Afghanistan possesses a long history of civilization that stretches back five thousand years. Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan in late 1979 after insurrection weakened the government's control. By 1989, the unpopular war resulted in a Soviet withdrawal that left Afghanistan to its raging civil war. The Taliban emerged from the south and presently controls about 95 percent of the country. The northern territory is controlled by the opposition coalition that in 1997 took the name United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan.

Landmine / UXO Overview

The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA), the United Nation's oldest mine action program, states that 732 sq km of land are contaminated by landmines, of which 590 sq km have been designated high-priority land. However, some parts of the country are not accessible, and MAPA states that the "full extent of the problem in Afghanistan is yet to be determined." Afghanistan's landmine/UXO problem hinders the country's rehabilitation and redevelopment and has caused the displacement of more than six million refugees.

Casualties

Since 1979, an estimated 400,000 people have been disabled by landmines and UXO. The number of male landmine victims is dramatically higher (95 percent) than female victims because women are not allowed in public without a close male family member. Most mine accidents take place far from roads or means of transportation, and the journey to medical aid can take many hours.

Demining

MAPA's mine clearance in Afghanistan consists of Manual Clearance Teams (MCT), Mine Dog Groups (MDG), which are combined manual and dog teams, a Mechanical Excavation Team (MET), Battle Area Clearance (BAC) teams, bomb disposal/EOD teams, community-based manual clearance teams and mine survey teams. MAPA implements mine action activities primarily through indigenous NGOs and a few international NGOs and maintains cooperation with Afghan authorities through the Department of Mine Clearance (DMC). No Afghan government agencies are directly engaged in demining or mine awareness.

Reality Check

The years of war have crippled Afghanistan's economy and destroyed the country's infrastructure. In the categories of greatest poverty and least development, the UNDP rates Afghanistan 171 out of 173 countries. Besides civil war and the repressive Taliban regime, the people of Afghanistan are suffering from the worst drought in 30 years; the United Nations estimates as many as five million people could die of starvation this year if not given aid.

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