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ICRC Weapons-contamination Activities in Colombia

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ICRC

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irregular clearance and timely deployment to the many communities requiring assistance. The two U.S.-sponsored projects in Bajo Grande, Bolivar and San Juan, Antioquia, required more than twice the initially planned two-turn-around time of four months to complete community clearance and turnover. Authorities are under strong external constraints to continue to operate under a mandate for a completely mine-free pattern, largely avoiding the complexities and paperwork associated with employing international standards for sampling and area reduction. With a potential budget shortfall for planned ERT projects, it is becoming increasingly clear that something must give, and additional donors are needed or many communities will be left in the dark.

In addition to funding shortfalls, incombent community infrastructure and economic turmoil prevent a fully successful turnover of these projects to townspeople, who were forced to seek a semi-nomadic existence seven or eight years after FARC forces. In Bajo Grande, lack of a definable water source, fully accessible roads, available health and school facilities as well as a reduced economic agricultural pattern are all obstacles for successful community reintegration that were addressed by PAACMA and Bajo Grande community leaders. In San Francisco, Antioquia, the integration has been smoother, largely because the surrounding area was not abandoned as it was in Bajo Grande. Until recently, security issues have deterred the townspeople from returning to San Francisco. This issue was resolved recently, allowing full economic and social integration to occur.

Additionally, economic conditions and expectations have changed over the last eight years since the internally displaced people have returned. One example is the expectation of returning IDPs to continue to farm tobacco, which was previously a successful cash crop. Upon returning, they found that the market for tobacco has drastically decreased. Thus, there is a renewed focus on community planning for future development and successful reintegration of IDPs.

The efforts of the ICRC have significantly helped Colombia where many other international organizations had found it difficult to assist because of the current political situation.

Wheatley: ICRC Weapons-contamination Activities in Colombia

The International Committee of the Red Cross has been working alongside the Colombian Red Cross to ease Colombia’s weapons-contamination problem, made more difficult by ongoing conflict. By combining preventive measures, victim assistance, rehabilitation programs and economic aid, the ICRC has strengthened Colombian organizations, while educating the public and assisting those negatively affected by explosive remnants of war.

The ICRC has significantly helped Colombia when many other international organizations had found it difficult to assist because of the current political situation.

by Andy Wheatley | International Committee of the Red Cross |

The Weapons-contamination Context

For Colombia, the ongoing use of improvised explosive devices, primarily activated by parties to the conflict. In such a context, effective and widespread humanitarian mine-clearance efforts are difficult, if not impossible. While the problem of weapons contamination is extremely dynamic, and the focus of the problem has changed and continues to change substantially in recent years. Areas highly affected three to four years ago may no longer be similarly affected today.

There are relatively few international and national organizations undertaking weapons-contamination activities in Colombia, and no international humanitarian mine-clearance agencies. Although donor interest has grown in recent years, implementation capacity remains relatively limited. Although, while the capacity of the Colombian government to manage the subject has improved substantially, capacity to coordinate activities continues to be limited.

The fact that the country remains in conflict has a number of implications. Access by government services, nongovernmental and international organizations is often extremely limited in the most conflict-affected parts of the country. This means that events often go unreported, civilian access to medical and other services is restricted, and the government, international community and civil-society organizations have limited capacity to respond. The result is often a mismatch between resources,
Prevention Activities

In 2007, the ICRC undertook a knowledge, attitude and behavior (KAB) campaign for orthopaedic technologists. The ICRC initiated and actively participated in the National Service of Apprenticeship, a national training program for orthopaedic technologists. The ICRC also provides risk education, through health and safety training in workshops, to emergency medical staff and staff working in both rural and urban areas in Colombia, and to employees of government and nongovernmental organizations. This training is provided to health-care professionals and those working in high-risk areas, such as demining and mine action, to prevent or reduce the risk of injury to civilians. The ICRC also provides risk education to other groups, such as those working in construction and other industries, to ensure that they are aware of the risks associated with working in areas contaminated with landmines and ERWs. The ICRC is also working with the Colombian Ministry of Health to develop risk-reduction programs for the general population, including schools and community centers. The ICRC is also working with the Colombian National Police to develop risk-reduction programs for police officers, to reduce the risk of injury to themselves and to the public. The ICRC is also working with the Colombian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) to develop risk-reduction programs for members of the country's security forces. The ICRC is also working with the Colombian National Culture of Peace to develop risk-reduction programs for the general public, to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence. The ICRC is also working with the Colombian National Commission for the Disabled to develop risk-reduction programs for people with disabilities, to ensure that they are aware of the risks associated with working in areas contaminated with landmines and ERWs.

Risk-reduction activities

The ICRC also undertakes risk-reduction activities for war-affected communities. These involve the provision of specific alternatives to weapons-contaminated communities based on a clear understanding of how weapons contamination affects them. This usually includes the provision of alternative heating, water or emergency water supplies, or other social support to the victims of war. The ICRC also provides social support to the victims of war, through the provision of alternative income-generating activities, to support the victims of war in restoring their livelihoods and their quality of life. The ICRC also provides social support to the victims of war, through the provision of alternative income-generating activities, to support the victims of war in restoring their livelihoods and their quality of life.