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The VA Information System in BiH

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Oslo Process Meeting Makes Progress in Banning Cluster Munitions

Representatives from 138 nations and 140 civil societies concluded the third major international conference on cluster munitions in early December 2007, noting that a cluster ban treaty will likely be signed in 2008. The conference, meeting in Vienna, Austria, reported that important progress was made on issues like victim assistance, clearance, stockpile destruction and inter-national cooperation and assistance.

Members of the civil societies came from more than 50 countries and praised the progress made at the conference. The need for standardized and monitored victim assistance was particularly important to these organizations, which sought consensus on assistance to victims and their families and communities, as well as on obligations to clear contaminated areas and stockpiles. Survivors of cluster munitions accidents also participated in the conference.

The most contentious part of the conference concern the prohibition of and definition of a cluster munition. While some representatives wanted to seek a total ban on all cluster munitions, others believed that the current treaty was wide enough to cover most modern cluster munitions. The conference ended with a call for a comprehensive ban on cluster munitions in 2008.

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News Brief

The VA Information System in BiH

According to the Landmine Impact Survey, conducted in 2002 and 2003, mine and UXO-contaminated locations directly impact the security of an estimated 1,376,000 people, 100,000 of whom live in highly-impacted communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the beginning of the conflict until the end of 2006, there were 4,822 mine/UXO casualties in BiH. In the period from 1992 until the end of 2006, there were 1,577 mine casualties, out of which 463 persons were killed. For the period 2005–2007, there was an increase compared to the period of 1998–2003 of mine accidents with 35 victims, including 18 deaths.

Demining has taken place in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 12 years. Landmine victim assistance in BiH is even older—the first landmine victim assistance activities started in early 1994. Naturally, the state had institutions that were expected to take care of the task, but it was unreasonable to expect them to contribute significantly in the majority of cases. In 1996, the government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia took the decision to conduct coordination through data sharing. This process demands the creation of coordination tools. The results of the Landmine Impact Survey, conducted in 2002 and 2003, mine- and UXO-contaminated locations directly impact the security of an estimated 1,376,000 people, 100,000 of whom live in highly-impacted communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Thus far, a number of different organisations have worked to provide aid to landmine victims, either through stand-alone projects or by working with other organisations to support their activities. The common denominator for all of them has been that they were gathering data and creating databases for their target groups and locations.

Nevertheless, there was no coordination of any kind, at the end of the day, the landmine victim-assistance issue is all about cooperation, and the importance of the national and international cooperation structure of the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina has a rather unique government structure encompassing one state, two different entities, 10 cantons within one of the entities and finally an independent district that is internationally supervised. In total, there are 14 different governments within the country.

While mine action was under the authority of the United Nations Mine Action Centre, it was not possible to think about meaningful coordination between a non-governmental organisation (UN Mine Action Centre) and a government organisation, so neither had much of a role in the mine- and UXO-contaminated locations directly impact the security of an estimated 1,376,000 people, 100,000 of whom live in highly-impacted communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A new, more specific national TNA developed within the national programme, through a process or contract and the UNDP submitted completion reports to donors. However, the failure of the current TNA to achieve the desired impact on the national mine-action programme. The need for more frequent evaluation. More than six years slipped between the first of the SMCs and SMCs and the initial overall review of such courses. The delivery partners wrote completion reports with each course or contract and the UNDP submitted completion reports to donors. However, while the desirability of assessing impact was recognized, an inappropriately long period transpired without evaluation, given that the UNDP spent some US$3.2 million, and others spent double that amount on this UNDP-funded training programme.

The impact of the manager training should be assessed more regularly at both the global and, more importantly, the national level. This review should include:

- Follow-up on each course to assess its impact and the use of materials at roughly three and 12 month intervals following the course to recommend steps within the national programme to make better use of the learning, and to provide feedback regarding possible adjustments to the training.
- Assessment of the impact of training on the performance of the national mine-action programme, especially from the perspective of the stakehold- ers who are dependent on the services of the mine-action programme.

In light of the existence of programmes that partly overlap services to targeted groups, which in turn leads to unnec- essary duplication of activities and inappropriate spending of available resources, the creation of a system of national landmine victim-assistance projects and activities is necessary among state governments, regional governments and organisations. There is a need to have an information system available to all interested parties and to provide appropriate information to those who need it. Specifically, the new information system is designed to address the following:

- Mine victims will get a reference database needed to define their status, present their needs and inform them of good and bad practices related to landmine victim-assistance activities.
- BHMAC will obtain all the mine-incident locations for all victims (previously this information was available only for BHMAC-gathered data).
- The donor community will have full oversight of all the projects, budgets required, final results of their donations, etc.
- Organisations will have access to the victim data (locations, gen- eral info, needs, etc.) required to plan projects and will be pro- vided with the conduit to present brief forms of their projects to the donor community in real time.
- This system will ensure timeliness and consistency of programs and projects, coverage of all impacted areas, efficiency in the use of resources and an exchange of lessons learned. Thus far, all stakeholders have been in the dark about all the issues, so this integrated database will prove to be a positive outcome for Bosnia.
- This process demands the creation of coordination tools. The results of the Landmine Impact Survey, conducted in 2002 and 2003, mine- and UXO-contaminated locations directly impact the security of an estimated 1,376,000 people, 100,000 of whom live in highly-impacted communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Center is recognized as a Landmine Victim Assistance Centre and the sub-strategy was developed and incorporated into the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Strategy.
Of course, the information system will be fully integrated into the Bosnian and Herzegovina Mine Action Information System and organised in a way to offer information to all interested parties. BHMAC will coordinate delivering and updating the data.

The Solution

The BHMAC information system was created to inform and start the information gathering and retrieval process needed by RH rather than to pass judgment on previous systems.

Taking all of the above into consideration, the guidelines for the system’s creation were to:
- Cover all data gathered by all organisations
- Avoid gathering medical treatment and other data that may be considered a privacy violation by the victims
- Provide a system with enough information to make a valid target-group assessment tool
- Provide initial information on mine-incident locations to improve mine-action planning
- Provide landmine victim-assistance projects a planning tool with full transparency and traceability for landmine victim-assistance projects
- Create a basic LAV’s questionnaire form
- Create reporting forms in order to assure regular information flow from all stakeholders into the system.

The Central Database Elaboration Project for the support and coordination of landmine victim-assistance activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was created and had all of its data verified in 2006. As a part of these activities, memoranda of cooperation were signed and data was acquired from the governmental organisation, will open a data entry office that will employ four landmine victim-assistance personnel.

The BHMAC BA 1474

Conclusion

Effective landmine victim assistance is a difficult task under the best of conditions and depends greatly on the efficient flow of information. To achieve coordination through data exchange, BHMAC undertook the tremendous task of compiling and organizing information on mine victims to better assess their needs. Getting numerous agencies and governments to cooperate and contribute was not easy, but the results of BHMAC’s efforts will have positive effects on all parts of the mine victim-assistance chain—from victim to donor to care providers, the new information system works to assure effective coordination of assistance.

Operating with UXO Containing White Phosphorus

This article provides a brief account of the unexploded ordnance problem in Azerbaijan and describes the particular hazards of dealing with UXO containing white phosphorus. Drawing from the experience of the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action’s work at Saloglu, guidelines for handling WP UXO are discussed.

by Ihram Azizov [Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action]

The efforts of the government of Azerbaijan and NATO to eliminate the country’s UXO problem resulted in an agreement between the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency and the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action. The agreement launched a joint project on clearing UXO and explosive hazards in the former military base at Saloglu in the Agstafa district of Azerbaijan in January 2006. The Saloglu Project was the first result of cooperation between Azerbaijan and NATO within the Partnership for Peace program. The project covers checking, clearance and removal of stockpiled UXO located at the town Agstafa and Piryl of Agstafa district.

After the implementation of the project, it has become clear that the problem is more serious and more difficult to solve than was initially thought by the international experts during their assessment missions to Azerbaijan. Obtaining some experience from the on-site operations conducted in the frame of the project, the ANAMA UXO operations team implemented a few new techniques for handling fuze-free UXO and devices containing explosives of various types, including those with WP. The following paragraphs present ANAMA’s experience gathered from operating with WP-containing devices.