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For many cities of Albania the current mine problem is a haunting reminder of the Kosovo Crisis of 1999. Upon returning, home after an evacuation of the Kosova Albanian border area, residents discovered the border polluted with mines and unexploded ordnance.

The Landmine/UXO Problem

The threat now facing Albania stems from anti-personnel and anti-tank mines laid by forces of the former Republic of Yugoslavia as well as from UXO released from NATO cluster munition during Operation Allied Force. There is also an abandoned explosive ordnance problem resulting from looting during internal civil unrest in 1997. Affected areas of Albania include 39 villages located in the districts of Kukes, Has and Tropoja. After the Kosovo Crisis ended, the Albanian Armed Forces’ Level One Survey concluded there were about 102 areas or 15.3 square kilometers (5.9 square miles) of mine-affected land along the border of Albania.

The mine threat presents an obstacle to Albania’s potential for development. Restricted access to valuable farming land has already restricted agricultural activities negatively on the local economy of the border area, which rely heavily on agriculture. Contaminated areas have only limited access to drinking water sources (5.9 square miles) of mine-affected land along the border of Albania.

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Albania

by Kateland Shane [Mine Action Information Center]

Albania, formerly known as a ‘war zone’ has made a remarkable transformation. At the time of the Kosovo crisis in 1999, Albania had a landmine problem affecting more than 2.5 million square meters (336 acres) of mine-affected land, making the problem one of the most severe and costly in the world. However, since the signing of the 1997 Mine Action Convention, Albania has made great strides in clearing its landmine problem. Since 1999, 13 police officers have suffered casualties while patrolling the mine-affected border. From 1999 to 2006, 272 mine/UXO-related casualties have occurred in Albania with 34 resulting in death. There were no casualties reported in 2007. While Albania no longer produces anti-personnel landmines, it continues to be mined, with more than 250,000 acres of land still contaminated with landmines and UXO.

Victim Assistance

As part of a 2004 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project, a community-based rehabilitation network with a staff of 30 nurses has been developed for emergency mine/UXO victims. Amputees in Albania are able to receive prostheses from the National Prosthetic Center in Tirana and the Rehabilitation Institute for Rehabilitation. In mid-2006, Handicap International also became involved in victim assistance in Albania providing training and support for local health workers. The Victims of Mine Action, a local NGO, also administers a revolving loan fund for a pilot project assisting mine survivors in becoming socioeconomically independent through micro-business and micro-enterprise training.

MRE-Education

In the area of MRE, organizations such as the VMA and the Albanian Red Cross will continue to provide MRE in the 39 affected communities. MRE activities include concerts, competitions and plays being delivered in affected communities to familiarize citizens with the risks of mines and UXO. An MRE curriculum has already been integrated into mine-affected community classroom curriculums, with the goal of being fully incorporated into Albania’s national educational system by 2009.

A Hopeful Future

Thirteen of the original 15.3 square miles (336 acres) of affected land have already been cleared according to national mine-action standards, thanks to organizations such as RONCO, HELP, Fondation Suisse de Déminage, DanChurchAid and with the financial support of the international community and Albanian government. Last year the number of mine casualties dropped from 152 in 1999 to 21 in 2004. The total number of mine casualties reported in 2006 were 31, with 15 involving child victims. In 2007, Albania reported 1 casualty. A Hopeful Future Today, Albania no longer produces anti-personnel landmines. On 8 September 1998, the Republic of Albania signed the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention. This was followed by the Albanian Mine Action Executive. The Albanian Mining Action Executive was established to carry out, coordinate, and monitor the mine action program under the supervision of the AMAC. The Albanian Mine Action Executive is currently in its third year of operation. The ALMAC plans to address the mine threat and UXO problem in Albania. The ALMAC plans to address the mine threat and UXO problem in Albania. The ALMAC is the main organization responsible for victim assistance in Albania.

Albania has worked as an Editorial Assistant for the Journal of Mine Action since May 2007. She graduated in May 2007 with a bachelor’s degree in English from Nova Southeastern University at James Madison University. She plans to return to JMU for graduate school.

Kaledand Shane

A hopeful future for mine action in Albania

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