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2007 Marks 10th Anniversary of Mine Action Standards

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to expand future work to address a number of issues, including appropriate testing of ground-preparation devices and vegetation cutters, enhancement of operator/crew safety testing, enhancement of mobility testing and performance-degradation testing. A series of mechanical equipment trials expanded by ITEP during 2006 using the CWA 15044 test protocol has further produced some useful experiences which will be taken into account when the CWA 15044 is updated, probably in 2008. Ongoing CWAs for test and evaluation of humanitarian-demining equipment. A CEN Workshop (CEN WS 26) on a Test Methodology for Personal Protective Equipment for use in humanitarian mine action kicked off in June 2006. The Standardiseringen i Sverig (SIS) and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHID) are co-chairing this CEN Workshop. The aim is to establish a framework to assist the development of National Mine Action Standards that can more accurately reflect specific local situations in a given country. The IMAS can be adapted as national standards where the United Nations, or another international body, temporarily assumes the responsibility of a mine-action authority. IMAS can also provide the framework for legal contracts between donors and implementing organizations.

There are currently a number of IMAS covering a wide range of issues from establishing to evaluating mine-action programmes. They include not only general guidelines for mine action but also standards for specific field activities such as clearance requirements or marking of hazards in demining operations. New IMAS are produced periodically based on requirements realised either in the field or at the management levels in mine action. The existing IMAS are reviewed every three years and amended or replaced with a new edition as needed. UNMAS has the mandated responsibility for development and maintenance of the IMAS. The work of preparing, reviewing and revising the IMAS is conducted by technical committees, with the support of international, governmental and non-governmental organisations. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining coordinates this process at the request of the United Nations. There is a Review Board of the IMAS that is responsible for overseeing the review and

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IMAS registration page.

organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and draw on the two main instruments of international law that regulate landmines: the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and Amended Protocol II and Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The IMAS provide general information on existing regulations and conventions that affect mine action, particularly those referring to international humanitarian law, clearance requirements, hazard marking and general safety issues.

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The International Mine Action Standards are guidelines set by the United Nations to implement mine-action programs safely and effectively. The author discusses the purpose and processes of the IMAS as well as provides various references for those interested in learning more about the IMAS.

by Faiz M. Paktian | Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining |
More than 40 countries have pledged to develop new international agreements to ban the use of mines. Some countries have also decided to terminate their investments in such companies, as the new law prohibits Belgian banks from owning companies that produce cluster bombs. Several Belgian banks have announced that they will no longer invest in such companies. The Belgian Senate passed legislation in early March to make such investment illegal and the law will be enacted in the near future.

Since the IMAs are continuously amended and new IMAs are being added, all readers should make sure they have the latest version of them. There are two ways to get an up-to-date version of the IMAs: visit the IMAS Web site at www.mineaction.org or ask the GICHD for an updated CD-ROM (see contact information below). As part of the continuing efforts to ensure accessibility of the standards to the mine-action community, UNMAS and the GICHD worked with the Web site manager of the Mine Action Information Center to redesign and streamline the site in 2007. In the new design, in addition to the IMAS in English, unofficial translations of some IMAS are now available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish for ease of reference. However, for the most up-to-date version, users must refer to the English version.

The Web site also houses and presents a number of National Mine Action Standards—standards produced by the mine-action authority of mine-affected countries that reflect a country’s specific situation and are based on the IMAS. They are posted for reference and information to assist the national authorities of those mine-affected countries that have yet to develop their own national standards. If you wish to post your national standards on the IMAS Web site, please send the GICHD an electronic copy of your standards (see contact information below).

An important feature of the new site is that users will have the ability to register for updates at the IMAS Web site. By requesting updates, you will receive an e-mail as soon as a new IMAS, NMAS or Technical Notes for Mine Action is posted on the Web site. The UNMAS and the GICHD welcome any questions, suggestions or comments about standards or their contributions to the mine-action community (see contact information below). Specialties are available to assist you in understanding the principle of IMAs and NMAS, building structures for NMAs, developing specific standards, reviewing your national standards and providing useful feedback. If you think you need help, please contact UNMAS or GICHD and they will be glad to provide you with appropriate advice.

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Investment in Cluster-bomb Manufacturers Criminalised

Belgium is the first country to criminalize the investment in companies that make cluster bombs. The Belgian Senate passed legislation in early March to make such investment illegal and the Parliament will publish a list of companies that manufacture cluster bombs. Several Belgian banks terminated their investments in such companies, as the new law prohibits Belgian banks from owning shares in cluster-bomb manufacturers or offering them credit.

More than 40 countries have pledged to develop new international agreements to ban the use of cluster bombs. Belgium was also the first country to entirely ban cluster munitions, which at least 23 countries have used.

I am in Ecuador, a Latin American country of 13.3 million people, at the invitation of the Office of Humanitarian Demining of the Organization of American States. The OAS oversees demining projects throughout Latin America. Some of you may remember that two years ago I went to Nicaragua on a similar mission. This time I was asked to conduct trauma-training seminars in Quito and then do a field assessment.

The purpose of my visit was to evaluate the emergency medical capabilities and evacuation process in the unlikely event of a demining injury. I spent time visiting the worksites and medical facilities, interviewing deminers and medical personnel, and gaining a full understanding of the situation. Overall it was a very productive mission and I received substantial positive feedback.

A Little Background

Ecuador is one of the smallest countries in South America and sits astride the equator—hence its name. There are four distinct regions: the coast, the Andes highlands, the Oriente (the east) and the Galapagos Islands. Quito, the capital city of 1.4 million people, sits in the Andes at about 9,000 feet (2,743 meters) in a long valley surrounded by mountains and volcanoes. The recently renovated Centro Histórico (historical center) is the old part of town designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site; it is quite impressive. The new part of town is quite modern, and plenty of American chain restaurants are visible on numerous street corners.

With a pre-capita gross domestic product of US$3,700, Ecuador is better off than most of the countries I have visited recently, but it still has a long way to go. Interestingly, in September 2000, Ecuador switched its currency and began using the U.S. dollar. Now I don’t mean that their currency is pegged to the dollar; they actually only use real U.S. dollars. U.S. coins, including the Sacajawea dollars that have all but disappeared from use in the States, are also in circulation.

Ecuador’s history includes colonization by the Incas in the early 15th century and later by the Spanish in 1533. The country gained independence in 1822 and soon after, a long border dispute began with Peru. Wars and skirmishes were fought every few years until 1995. A compromise was finally reached and a peace treaty signed in 1998 when Ecuador gained a square kilometer (0.4 square mile) of land that was previously considered Peru’s. One of the unfortunate lasting results of the conflict, however, is an estimated 11,000 unmarked landmines.

Santiago’s Situation

Since the humanitarian mine-action programs began in Ecuador in 1999, there have been no demining injuries, however, one civilian death and two injuries have been reported in the region around Santiago. The sites we visited most recently began operations in 2004. Clearing is expected to continue until 2008 or 2009. Although clearing landmines is usually a slow, arduous and dangerous task, working in the jungle presents even more complex problems. Unlike minefields I have seen in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Sudan, in Ecuador the mountainous terrain mixed with the thick jungle vegetation, humidity and high temperatures present even greater challenges.

The Mine Injury and Trauma Seminar: A Way to Save Lives

The author describes his journey to Ecuador for a seminar he was invited to teach for medical personnel working in or around demining sites. Working with the Organization of American States, the author developed a seminar to teach mine-clearance experts what actions to take if someone is injured by a mine, enabling personnel to react to multiple types of stimuli while working in the field. The author explains the details of this seminar and why it is an important part of the mine-action process. He also provides information on Ecuador’s own mine problem.

by Adam Kushner, MD, MPH