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Somaliland

Profile Somaliland

by Megan Wertz

Megan Wertz was an Editorial Assistant with the Journal of Mine Action from August 2005 until May 2006. She graduated from James Madison University with a Bachelor of Science in technical and scientific communication. Wertz attends The George Washington University where she is obtaining a Master of Arts in public policy. She hopes to pursue a career in environmental policy.

L andmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Somaliland is the result of the 1964 and 1977–78 border wars with Ethiopia and the 1988–91 civil war between the Siad Barre regime and the Somali National Movement. The Barre regime placed landmines as a weapon of war, and many of the landmines, using mines to threaten the civilian population and protect military installations and civilian infrastructure against SNM attacks. The Republic of Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in May 1991, however, since the international community does not recognize it as an independent state, it is unable to accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. Somaliland officials have expressed their commitment to the Convention, but no legal measures have been taken to prohibit use, production, trade or stockpiling of anti-personnel mines. Somaliland has also not formally acceded to the Geneva Call-promoted Deed of Commitment.

The Landmine Problem

A Landmine Impact Survey of four regions carried out by the OSOM Mine Action Center in March 2003 found 357 mine-impacted communities and 276 caucuses between 2001 and 2005. For 2005, the OSOM Mine Action Center recorded 38 new mines/UXO casualties through August. Landmines and UXO block roads and access to pasturage, the most serious blockages are of drinking water sources in areas of irrigation and floodplains.

No formal mining or fencing of mined areas is being implemented, due to the theft of the materials and the difficulties of accurately marking mined areas that are often already at least partially used by local populations. According to Nick Beerman, a representative for Danish Demining Group, the biggest blockage due to landmines are old roads that were mined during the civil wars, but communities quickly set up de novo roads so the infrastructure is little constraint in terms of mobility.

Mine Action programs

National efforts. The National De-mining Agency and the Somaliland Mine Action Center are responsible for mine action activities in Somaliland. SMAC, established as an independent agency in 1999 with United Nations Development Programme support, carries out mine-action coordination, planning and quality management with a staff of 32 professionally trained employees. With UNDP support, SMAC approved a National Policy on Mine Action, which is being reviewed in the Somaliland House of Representatives. The NDA is responsible for building local capacities for clearance, survey and mine-risk education. The main goals for SMAC are to clear access to water sources and grazing areas free of high-impact areas by 2006 and remove 20 percent of mines by 2008. SMAC has been in Somalia since 2003, focusing on mine-action capacity building and technical assistance. The UNDP “mine-action work plus for Somalia includes supporting activities to establish sustainable EOD [explosive ordnance disposal] and mine clearance teams based on existing local police and army capacity, and the creation of mine action centers in affected regions to coordinate activities.” The UNDP focuses on local and national capacity building.

In southern and central Somalia, an nongovernmental organization blockaded a landmine-impacted region in 1997, and 10,000 items of ordnance were disarmed and disposed of through the program.

An End in Sight

Bateman says it is: “The light is at the end of the tunnel for the clearance of Somaliland and mine clearance.” The hard work and dedication of agencies like DDG and HI, together with UNDP and SMAC, and the local communities will create a mine-safe Somaliland. DDG’s vision for Somaliland’s mine action program is to create a mine-safe Somalia soon.

For the past year, DDG has instead focused on developing a final two-year phase of the Village by Village EOD Clearance Program, with help from UNICEF and Handicap International, attracting donors, and creating a workable plan to hand over responsibilities for community-based EOD work to police EOD teams when DDG leaves Somaliland in March 2006.

DDG vision for Somaliland’s mine clearance is to reduce the effects of UXO/mine contamination to levels that are no worse than other socioeconomic problems such as poor health or educational services, and does not hinder economic development. DDG believes that with additional well-targeted assistance from international NGOs, most communities will be able to effectively manage the problem. This vision has clearly been reached; ERW in Somaliland is now a "minor blip on the humanitarian screen."

Mine-risk Education

Somaliland’s mine action is slow due to internal conflict impeding efforts like plant surveys, clearance and mine-risk education activities. There is no functioning mine-action center for the whole of Somalia nor is there a mine-action strategy. The United Nations Development Programme has been in Somalia since 2003, focusing on mine-action capacity building and technical assistance. The UNDP “mine action work plus for Somalia includes supporting activities to establish sustainable EOD [explosive ordnance disposal] and mine clearance teams based on existing local police and army capacity, and the creation of mine action centers in affected regions to coordinate activities.” The UNDP focuses on local and national capacity building.

A Mine-safe Somalia

If mine-action centers are established in southern and central Somalia, it is plausible that, working with the centers in Somaliland and Puntland, they could develop a national mine-action strategy. Establishing a united mine-action effort will be the biggest step toward creating a mine-safe Somalia. The United Nations believes “the mine and landmine threat in Somalia is a limiting problem,” that one that can be solved in seven to 10 years if given the appropriate amount of attention and resources.

To view endnotes and references for this article, visit http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/vol18/profiles/somaliland/somaliland.htm.

Newswire

Canadian Group Holds National Yard Sale for Peacekeepers

The Canadian Landmine Foundation recently held a special event to mark the 50th anniversary of Canadian peacekeeping efforts. Between May 19 and August 9, CLMF encouraged Canadians to register their yard sales online and receive a tax benefit for any proceeds that were then donated to the group.

The entire project is designed to increase awareness of Canada’s contribution of the peacekeeping and current mine-action projects. Learn more at www.clmf.org.