February 2000

Croatia

Country Profile
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CROATIA


LANDMINE AND UXO OVERVIEW: Authorities estimate that there may be as many as 1 million mines in Croatia with most laying along the former confrontation line. Both sides of the conflict made liberal use of mines. Mines were laid to protect defensive positions and in areas of strategic and economic importance: railways, utility stations, pipelines and even Plitvice National Park. Most mine fields are unmarked. Where marking does exist, it may not be accurate. As a result of four years of fighting, there is considerable UXO, over 300 tons, in areas where there has been conflict, like Dubrovnik. At least 2,300 miles of Croatian territory is littered with mines with at least 3,000 miles in Eastern Serbia, the last Serb held territory. Fifteen thousand mines were laid in the area behind Sibenik close to a popular tourist spot, the Krka waterfalls. The Croatian Ministry of Reconstruction estimates it will take at least eight years and $400 million to demine the republic.

VICTIMS AND CASUALTIES: Since 1990 over 700 people have been permanently disabled. There have been over 950 amputations. Other statistics state over 300 children have been killed and 1000 injured by mines. Between 1990-1998 other statistics report that 2,437 people have been injured or killed. Accurate statistics have been difficult to obtain, especially in Serb controlled regions. Currently, there are no prosthetic workshops or disability laws in Croatia. Mine victims receive first aid and medical assistance based on their health insurance coverage.

DEMELING: Mine clearance is currently underway. Previously, Croatian mine clearance had been carried out by the Croatian Army, Special Police and Civilian Defense. In June 1996, the Croatian Government established a demining agency known as MUNGOS. In Eastern Slovenia, two Croatian clearing agencies, TNT and Desk are conducting mine clearance under contract with MUNGOS. In February 1998 national law was changed to allow for more international participation. Between 1995-1998 some 50,000 mines were removed.

MAR REALITY CHECK: Amnesty International reported civilian torture when the Yugoslavian National Army moved into Kosovo, Croatia followed by Serbian paramilitary. After beating and killing many civilians, 30 civilian males were ordered into a field to pick grapes. They entered the field holding each other by the hand and quickly realized they were entering a mine field. Upon spotting a trip wire they stopped, at which point they were ordered to pull it by hand. A series of landmine explosions followed interspersed with machine-gunn shots. The account describes some of the victims being so badly wounded that they begged to be killed.

THE CROATIAN MINE ACTION CENTER (HCR): In 1998, the Croatian government established the Croatian Mine Action Center to aid Croatia in their mine action programs. HCR provides assistance in all aspects of mine clearance to include mine awareness, mine surveys and minefield marking. Based in Zagreb, HCR is also active in raising funds for mine-related activities.

Georgia

HISTORY: Following the April 9, 1991, independence from the former Soviet Union, Georgia was beset by ethnic and civil strife. The continuing argument over the political status of Abkhazia resulted in violence. In September 1993, Georgian forces withdrew from the Abkhazia region. Although Georgia stabilized, South Ossetia and Abkhazia remain elusive. The conflict in South Ossetia has been dormant since spring 1994, but sporadic violence continues between Abkhaz forces and Georgian partisans in western Georgia. Of their estimated population of 5,000,000, Georgia still has about 250,000 internally displaced people as a result of these conflicts. After adopting a new constitution in October 1995, Georgia has focused on economic reform and governmental stability.

LANDMINE AND UXO OVERVIEW: The U.N. Security Council has condemned the continued laying of mines, including mines of a more sophisticated type, and has called upon parties to take all measures to prevent mine laying. Mines exploded in the town of Ochamchire and later in the Ochamchire and Tskhinvali regions, which contain an estimated 27,000. There are maps documenting the mine fields, but many of the mines are unmarked, some maps are incorrect and access to the true limits is limited.

VICTIMS AND CASUALTIES: School children have been blown up taking shortcuts and civilians and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Peacekeepers have been killed and wounded, but there has been a recent reduction in casualties because of a large number of people have left the mined territories. According to information from the Head of Science and Technical Research, Department of Georgian Army General Staff, about 70 percent of casualties during the war were landmine victims.

DEMELING: Georgia has no national capacity for demining, mine awareness programs or survivor assistance. It lacks funds, proper equipment and trained deminers to conduct mine clearance operations. The government has expressed an interest in U.N. demining assistance, but none can be provided without similar approval from the Abkhaz side. The non-governmental organization HALO Trust is conducting humanitarian mine clearance in Abkhazia. The CIS Peacekeeping Forces in the Gali area refused to carry out further mine clearance in 1996 because of the security situation.

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Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2000