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Afghanistan

Country Profile

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AFGHANISTAN

HISTORY
Afghanistan is predominantly an Islamic country that gained full independence from British rule in 1919 after centuries of dispute. Since that time, it has changed from a monarchy to a republic, leading up to a Soviet-supported coup in 1979 that caused over 5 million Afghans to flee the country. The United States funded rebel groups in the 1980s in an attempt to force Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which finally occurred in 1989. However, continuing conflicts throughout the 1990s caused millions of Afghans to remain in countries like Pakistan and Iran, while the landmine situation was further exacerbated.

LANDMINES/UXO OVERVIEW
While 665 square km of land have been cleared of mines and UXO since 1993, about 717 sq. km of Afghanistan remains contaminated. Of this total, 439 sq. km are considered high priority. The breakdown of the affected areas is as follows: 61 percent grazing land, 26 percent agricultural land, 7 percent roads, 4 percent residential areas and 1 percent irrigation systems. This breakdown, which includes many heavily trafficked areas, has partly caused the exploitation of thousands of Afghans. In 1999, 72,098 people were relocated following demining efforts.

CASUALTIES
Due to years of fighting, Afghanistan finds itself lagging behind much of the world in terms of literacy rates, educational facilities and urban development. These deficiencies increase the need for mine awareness education for the general population. In 1999 alone, 979,640 people received mine awareness education—a sign of progress, although mine awareness organizations clearly still have their work cut out for them.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Mr. Mohammad Iqbal
Program Officer
Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA)
House 292, Street 55, F-10/4
P.O. Box 1809
Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel: (9251) 211 451-5
Fax: (9251) 211 450

DEMINING
From 1990 to April 2000, 205,842 AP mines, 9,199 AT mines and 1,054,738 UXO were cleared from Afghan fields, roads and residential areas. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) estimates that between government organizations and NGOs there are about 5,000 mine action workers implementing mine action programs in the country.

REALITY CHECK
The Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) believes that 644 square km of land is mined in the country, with an additional 1,400 sq. km suspected of mine contamination. Many of the landmines affecting Cambodia are found along the Thai border, where a majority of fighting has occurred since 1979. Meanwhile, the country is also affected by UXO remaining from the Vietnam War. In 1998, a U.S. Department of State report estimated the number of mines in Cambodia to be about 4 million - 6 million, although the actual figure is unknown.

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CASUALTIES
Casualties are decreasing at a considerable rate in Cambodia. 1,012 people were killed or injured by landmines in 1999, a 41 percent decrease from the previous year. From January to May 2000, 417 casualties were reported—a rate of about 83 per month, compared to 84 per month in 1999. These numbers show significant improvement in the last four years—casualties occurred at a rate of 254 per month in 1996. Unfortunately, the number of mine-related accidents involving children has increased from 16 percent in 1996 to 30 percent through May 2000. This increase is generally attributed to the increase of resettlement and land clearance due to times of repatriation from Thai border camps.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Cambodian Mine Action Center
P.O. Box 176
Bldg. 10-12, Road 528
Quarter Boeung Kak 1
District Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel: 855-23-981083/4
Fax: 855-23-367096
E-mail: CMAC@camnet.com.kh
Website: www.cambnet.com.kh/cmac

CAMBODIA