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Jab Swart

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Aiming to set up a sustainable institution for resolving Somalia's mine problem and to provide direct support for mine action activities there, the United Nations Mine Action Program for Somalia is making a difference in a country ravaged by years of conflict.

The Mine Action Program for Somalia

by Jab Swart, UN MA Manager Somalia

Introduction

Following years of devastation caused by civil war, clan conflict and power struggles, large areas of Somalia have regained a measure of peace and security and begun to move towards recovery. The experience of northwest and northeast Somalia in particular has been an important factor in the security and restoration of law and order as essential to the creation of an enabling environment for the advance towards economic and social recovery, and in many areas, creditable authorities have emerged. However, Somalia is still a divided country, and in some instances, such as Mogadishu, even single cities are ruled by up to four different authorities. The end of conflict in these areas has, however, not eliminated continued threats to security. The lack of resources to reestablish peace and security is often reflected in continued instability, and while basic rules of law are being established by the emerging administrations, their actual capabilities remain limited. Large numbers of landmines deployed during the conflicts of the past two decades pose serious threats to people and their livestock and limit access to valuable resources.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) strategy for the Somalia program is based on an integrated and coordinated approach aimed at bridging the gap between relief and development and fostering an enabling environment for sustainable human security and development. The UNDP country program is implemented through interventions in three broad program areas:

- Peace and security, including civil protection
- Capacity building for governance
- Economic recovery and poverty reduction

The Somali Civil Protection Program (SCPP) aims to consolidate and reinforce the still fragile peace and enhance economic and social recovery, by establishing a secure enabling environment. This will be achieved through the SCPP's program activities in five project areas:

- Social mobilization
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former military personnel
- Small arms control
- Rule of Law
- Mine Action

For the purpose of post-conflict recovery and development and in this case, Mine Action Somalia is divided into four regions, namely northwest (Somaliland), central and southeast (Somalia). The UNDP Mine Action Program (UNMA) is in effect managing four separate projects, with an additional fifth sub-project in Mogadishu to provide for the oscillating areas there.

The Mine/UFO Problem

Mines were first laid in significant numbers in 1966, during the conflicts with Ethiopia primarily along the border (mostly as barrier AT mine fields), and later, especially between 1977 and 1978. With the rise of resistance movements and civil conflicts, in the early 1980s, these mine fields were expanded further into Somali territory to deter incursions, and the Somali Army laid additional mine fields throughout the territory in places of strategic importance. When civil war broke out in 1988, the Army heavily utilized all its defensive positions and around military camps. Both the resistance movements and the government mined roads and paths used by one or the other, and mines were used randomly to terrorize the nomad and rural populations. Since 1991, some additional mines (mostly in the form of AP resistance mine fields) have been placed in towns where local conflict situations have erupted. In the northwest, the most heavily mined areas were around Zeila, Berbera, Hargeisa and Borama. Now most of the mines in Hargeisa and Borago have been removed. In addition to this, most of the roads between major towns were mined, but the Hargeisa-Berbera-Buroo road has now been cleared. Most of the mine fields along the Ethiopian border are still in place.

In northeast Somalia, mines are mostly concentrated along the Ethiopian border and along the inter-clan conflict line running through Galleyo. Although some defensive mine fields were also laid along the central and south Somalia borders with Ethiopia, most of the mining took place during the counter-insurgency wars by the national and regional forces from 1981 to 1991 and the subsequent clan conflicts. The regions most severely affected were Galleyo, Hargeisa, Bakool and Bayo Juba. Defensive mine fields were laid around strategically important towns and military bases (such as Belet Weyne and Huddur), while mines were laid extensively for route denial between Galleyo, Belet Weyne, Baidoa and Mogadishu. The Rahanwein Resistance Army makes no secret of the fact that they are still mining the road between Baidoa and Mogadishu to discourage the perceived threat of attack. Before 1993, very little mining took place in the Mogadishu area. Since then, mines have been used extensively in ambushes against American forces, in strategic protection of areas such as the airport and seaport, as well as in defensive mine fields between warring clans. Warfare in Mogadishu is unpredictable and mining continues around Mogadishu, and they supposedly have received large consignments of mines as recently as last year. In the southeast, defensive mines were extensively used in inter-clan fighting. Defensive mine fields were laid around Kismayo and Barbehor, where mines were used extensively for route denial between Kismayo and Mogadishu and from Kismayo up the Juba Valley to Luq. Forms of UNO continue to contaminate Somali territory for years. Explosives and bunkers filled with a variety of bombs, missiles and warheads in former military bases, battle areas and most urban areas. The towns mostly affected are those where the heaviest fighting took place, namely Berbera, Hargeisa and Galleyo, and to a lesser degree, in Adado in the northeast, Belet Weyne and Huddur in central Somalia; and Mogadishu and Kismayo in the south. In addition, stockpiles of mines remain (also in private hands), and the Somali authorities have requested assistance in addressing the problem. Such a recognized state, Somalia cannot be a signatory to the Ottawa Convention, but authorities such as those in northwest Somalia, northeast Somalia and the Somali Transitional National Government (TNG) in Mogadishu subscribe to the requirements of the Treaty.

A major problem is that the location and extent of mine fields is largely unknown, and therefore the magnitude of the problem to be contained has not been accurately determined. A limited mine action information system currently exists (in northwest Somalia), and although some Level One and Two Surveys and Clearance have been conducted by several international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and the UNDP, the results of these actions are inadequate for use as a basis for future mine action planning. On the positive side, four credible INGOs, Danish Demining Group (DDG), The HALO Trust, Mine Advisory Group (MAG) and Saint Barbara Foundation (SBF) are involved in mine action activities in northwest Somalia and, contingent on available funding, plan to expand to other regions. However, Somalia still lacks an overall coherent, coordinated mine action database necessary to engage in mining in and around the mining activities increase throughout the territory. Effective institutions to coordinate mine action are also needed for long-term sustainability. UNDP Somalia mine action arranged a workshop in January 2002 to formulate a strategic mine action plan for northwest Somalia and prioritize mine action activities based on existing information. In addition to this, UNDP mobilized resources for a comprehensive Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) in Somalia, during 2002. This survey will also assess and analyze the socio-economic impact of the mine/UFO contamination on a village-to-village basis. This information, in turn, will be updated to utilize the mine action priorities in the region.

The significant negative socio-economic impact of landmine and UFO contamination can be seen in almost every aspect of Somali society: reduced land and animal usable for livestock and cultivation; increased transportation costs, obstacles to reparation and reintegration of communities, poor performance of rehabilitation efforts, loss of lives, disability, psychological problems and general lack of security of communities. In 2000, the reported mine victims were 107 in the northwest, 101 in the northeast, 147 in central Somalia, and 203 in Mogadishu, of which roughly 40 percent resulted in fatalities. These figures are by no means complete, as the reporting system is very fragmented. The presence of mines has prevented the return of approximately 200,000 refugees from Djibouti and Ethiopia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had anticipated closing those camps by 2001 but has continually fallen short of their targets, in large part because of mine fields—real or perceived. The Mine/UFO threat is a finite problem, however, and given sustained support and funding, it can be solved within seven to 10 years.

Mine Action Activities

UN Capacity Building

The progress of project activities in northwest and northeast Somalia has taken many years to develop sustainable mine action capacities. The activities focused in the areas of strengthening local mine action structures and institutional capacity for mine field survey, marking and database, mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance. Close cooperation with mine clearance organizations and improved coordination among them were successfully achieved.

The mine action component of the SCPP has been operational since 1998. Until the end of 1999, the component was directly involved in demining subcontracts in Buroo (northwest Somalia), and approximately 400,000 square meters were cleared. Since December 1999, the component has been involved in the effort of mine clearance in the northwestern region. The United Nations, with the support of MAG and the TNG, is currently involved in this activity. The 22 people who make up the staff of the SMAC have been fully trained to execute their responsibilities with very little supervision. The training
Somalia, the Department of Demining, Demobilization and Reintegration was identified as SCPP-MA as a Mine Action counterpart. A core Punland Mine Action Office was identified and will be established in Baidoa soon.

Consultations with the authorities on extending the Mine Action program to central and south Somalia were quite successful. The TNF is currently reviewing the draft Mine Action policy provided by SCPP-MA, and UNDP Somalia gave the go-ahead to establish a Mogadishu Mine Action Office. A Mine Action Office was planned and will be established in Baidoa soon.

SCPP-MA assisted the authorities in northwest Somalia and northeast Somalia in drawing up mine action policies, which were later being debated in the Somaliland parliament and were already ratified in Puntland. SCPP-MA was invited to participate in the design of the institutional framework for Mine Action in northeast Somalia. SCPP-MA advised the authorities on the principles of the Ottawa Convention and included in a work plan for northwest and northeast Somalia to implement the international ban on AP landmines, and presented the plan to the Regional Conference on Landmines in Djibouti.

The Halo Trust, Mine-Tech and SBF. As a result, almost 30 million square meters of land were released to communities in northeast Somalia through survey and clearance. It is expected that the SMAC will be subcontracted to the national Mine Action authorities in 2002.

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has already conducted an advance assess­ment mission for a countrywide NTS of Somalia and the first phase, the survey of northwest Somalia, has been funded and will commence in April 2002, conducted by DDG:
- Collection and collation of data.
- Compilation and distribution of data to all clients, including other depart­ments and humanitarian organizations.

Mine Clearance

The physical detection and destruc­tion of mines and UXO are carried out in accordance with national priorities and the International Standards on Humanitarian Mine Clearance Operations. The UN MA program includes ensuring that deminers are provided the necessary train­ning and equipment to conduct clearance operations in an efficient and safe man­ner. UNDP does not conduct clearance operations itself, but assists in the capacity building of national mechanisms to coordinate all Mine Action activities, including survey and clearance by its in­ternational partners. Furthermore, the UNDP ensures that the national authorities develop capacities to deal with UXO and the residual mine/UXO threat after the conclusion of the international Mine Action program. UNDPA Somalia MA ex­ecutes the following additional activities:
- Assisting in the establishment of standard EOD capabilities in the four regions, to deal with UXO and the residual mine threat after the international demining program are concluded.
- Encouraging survey and clearance in areas where mining has come to an end and coordinating mechanisms have been established.
- Mobilizing resources for mine ac­tion activities in cooperation with UNDP Somalia.

Mine Risk Education

The scope, target groups and cover­age of MRE in Somalia will be expanded to cover all the mine-affected areas and populations. In particular, mine aware­ness policies are established, and plans are formulated and implemented in coopera­tion with UNICEF, NGOs and authorities.

Victim Assistance

Training local professionals, coordi­nating existing resources and acquiring additional resources are required. In par­ticular, victim assistance policies are established and plans formulated and implemented in cooperation with WHO, NGOs and authorities.

Conclusion

At the end of the project, it is ex­pected that an appropriate mine action strategy and policy based on thorough consultation will be in place and the follow­ing will have been achieved:
- Strengthening appropriate institu­tional management, financial and administrative mechanisms, which will allow Somalis to effectively manage, coordinate, oversee and support all compo­nents of the mine action program in a transparent and responsive manner.
- Strengthening the process for elaborating National Mine Action Plans, including setting priorities.
- Improving a sustainable mine clearance indigenous national capacity that is competent in technical, adminis­trative and policy matters and that will require reduced external technical assis­tance in the future.
- Developing mine awareness policy and expanding MRE activities to addi­tional populations.
- Providing victim assistance policy and strengthening mine victim treatment centers.
- Improving the efficiency and effec­tiveness of the overall mine action program within the country.
- Increasing the level of donor confi­dence.

These measures will in turn result in:
- Quicker clearance of contaminated areas resulting in reduced deaths and in­juries and appropriate medical care for mine-victims.
- Released land for resettlement of displaced persons and returning refugees and for agricultural development. Recon­struction and rehabilitation of public in­frastructures including schools, roads, bridges and commercial and industrial enterprises will also be accelerated.

While it is not expected that Soma­lia will be totally free of mines within the duration of the project, the objective is to set a sustainable institution for resolv­ing the mine problem in place and to provide direct support for mine action activities. Regional administrations have already taken important steps toward that end, and this project will result in con­siderable further advances. Nonetheless, based on discussions with administrations and experience with mine action pro­grams in other countries, it is expected that the local institutions involved will require further assistance for several years beyond the end of this project, including both technical assistance and resources for mine action operations.

Contact Information

Jub Swart, Manager
UN MA Somalia
Tel: +2528220069
E-mail: smp@unonline.no

UNMEE-MACC

Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center: UNMEE-MACC

The United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, along with eight other local NGOs, are working to rid their lands of the mixture of AT and AP mines laid in conventional military patterns during conflicts dated back to 1935.

By Bob Kudryba, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea Mine Action Coordination Center

Background

The conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia can be traced back to before the period of Italian colonization, which commenced in 1935. Many attempts to secure an independent Eritrea finally succeeded in 1993, when Ethiopia gained formal independence from Ethiopia. How­ever, relations soured between the one­time allies when Ethiopia introduced its own currency (the Nakfa) in November 1997, creating a trade war between the two nations.

On May 13, 1998, Ethiopia's Par­liament declared war on Eritrea. After the 1998 fighting failed to achieve any clear advantage to either side, the Ethiopians and Eritreans fell into a trench warfare situation reminiscent of World War I. In order to reinforce this system of trench lines, extensive patterns of mines—both AT and AP—were laid to strengthen and reinforce the positions. As a side gained advantage and took control of a trench system, mines were laid on the opposite side, creating a confusing array of defense systems. Shelling of targets by artillery and bombing attacks by aircraft contrib­uted to the problem with UXOlicting the battlefields. In fact, some estimates say that UXO outweigh the problem of mines 15:1.

The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities signed by Ethiopia and Eritrea in Algiers on 18 June 2000, provided for an immediate cessation of all armed and air at­tacks and requested the assistance of the UN and the Organization of African Union (OAU) in its implementation. In particular, the parties called on the UN to deploy a peacekeeping mission under the auspices of the OAU to monitor the cessation of hostilities.

This process is for the continuation of proximity talks be­tween the two parties, leading to a com­prehensive peace agreement on issues re­lated to the final definition of the border between the two countries: the current border is the old Italian Colonial border. This undertaking has yet to be resolved, particularly the agreement on the final border definition and line.

With respect to demining and mine ac­tion activities, the agreement says, "...both parties shall conduct demining as soon as possible with a view to creating the conditions necessary for the deploy­ment of the Peacekeeping Mission, the return of civilian administration and re­turn of the population as well as the de­limitation and demarcation of their com­mon border. The Peacekeeping Mission, in conjunction with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) will as­sist the parties' demining efforts by pro­viding technical advice and coordination. The parties shall, as necessary, seek addi­tional demining assistance from the Peacekeeping Mission."

Landmine and UXOSituation

In addition to the residual threats posed by landmines and UXO from old conflicts, the recent conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998—2000) poses a significant threat throughout the con­flict area. This threat is primarily centered to the "no man's land" that runs between the trenches along the confrontation lines (May 1998 and May—June 2000).

These mine fields contain a mixture of AT and AP mines that are laid mainly in conventional military patterns. Addi­tionally, unmarked and unrecorded sui­