

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 6
Issue 3 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 37

December 2002

An OAS Update

CISR JMU

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Recommended Citation

JMU, CISR (2002) "An OAS Update," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 6 : Iss. 3 , Article 37.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss3/37>

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An OAS Update

The Organization of American States (OAS) Mine Action Program works extensively in Central America. Over the past year, a number of activities have been conducted, including the organization's expansion to parts of South America.

by Whitney Tolliver, MAIC

Introduction

The OAS Mine Action Program, known formally as the "Comprehensive Action Against Antipersonnel Mines (AICMA)," supports a wide range of mine action activities in six member states, including Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru. The Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) of the General Secretariat provides the overall coordination and management of the Program. Cooperation with international entities over the past year has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of all of the mine action programs. The following is a brief update on AICMA's activities and specifically in Nicaragua.

AICMA Program Activities

Demining Activities

From September 2001 to August 2002, AICMA expanded demining activities from Central America to include operations in Peru and Ecuador. So far, more than 6,000 mines and 300,000 square-meters of land have been cleared. The United States and the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB) provided military trainers to conduct demining

training courses for 50 Nicaraguan Army personnel in November 2001.

Since June 2002, demining officials from Peru and Ecuador have met to discuss the mutual cooperation of mine clearance activities along their common border in Zarumilla Channel. Both countries are developing plans that will be assisted by the OAS in the near future.

Stockpile Destruction

Last year the AICMA program raised \$487,533 (U.S.) from international donors to complete a project called the "Managua Challenge" to complete stockpile destruction. By September 2001, Peru and Ecuador joined Honduras as OAS member states to finalize the process before the Third Meeting of the States Parties. Peru destroyed over 313,000 mines over a four-month period, Ecuador 154,344, and in August 2002, Nicaragua destroyed the last of its stockpiled mines, retaining only a limited number for training purposes.

Nicaragua

This update focuses on two recent mine action activities in Nicaragua:

- In May and June 2002 the AICMA assisted Nicaraguan authorities in a mission to contact civilians in Nueva Segovia

about the presence of near-by landmines. As a result, 250 mines and 60 pieces of unexploded ordnance (UXO) were identified and destroyed.

- In coordination with the National Institute of Technology of Nicaragua (INATEC), the OAS supported a training workshop for 25 victims of anti-personnel (AP) mines. The courses will last eight months and include skills in auto mechanics, carpentry, shoemaking, computer technology and cosmetology. The training is part of a two-year pilot project that may be expanded, depending on its success and continued donor participation. ■

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