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## The U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program: Helping Countries “Get on Their Feet”

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# The United States Humanitarian Mine Action Program: Helping Countries "Get on Their Feet"



Since 1988, the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program (formerly Humanitarian Demining Program) has been involved in mine action efforts around the globe. While much has been written about the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program over the past few years, it is useful to review the program's fundamentals if only to remind ourselves of its policy and procedural aspects.



A Cambodian child walking along a minefield.

by Jenny Lange, U.S. State Department Fellow

## Introduction

With respect to demining and the other core elements of humanitarian mine action, the United States has been engaged since 1988, helping mine-affected countries worldwide to develop programs that remedy the problem created by

landmines and UXO. These programs range from providing mine risk education (MRE) to training, equipping, and operating a cadre of deminers and sustaining their work with the country's national demining organization. The latter represents the high end of U.S. support and is designed to develop and sustain indigenous mine action programs. This article does not focus on assistance to landmine survivors, for which the U.S.

Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Leahy War Victims Fund holds primacy with respect to U.S. assistance.

The U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program seeks to relieve human suffering while promoting U.S. interests, with the objectives of reducing civilian casualties, creating conditions for the safe return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes, fostering regional stability, facilitating economic and social recovery, and encouraging international cooperation and participation. By the end of U.S. Fiscal Year (FY) 2003, the United States will have provided over \$700 million (U.S.) to support mine action initiatives in 44 countries.

## Obtaining U.S. Demining Assistance

When a mine-affected country desires the support of the U.S. government, it generally requests assistance via the U.S. Embassy. If the Embassy endorses the request, it is then submitted to an interagency process headed by the National Security Council (NSC). Participating in this process are the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Defense (DoD), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), USAID, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Upon receiving a U.S. Embassy-endorsed request for assistance, the interagency process leads to a determination as to whether to conduct a Policy Assessment Visit to assess the nature of the mine/UXO problem, the requesting nation's commitment to solve the problem

and the suitability of U.S. assistance. Based on this assessment, the interagency process may lead to the establishment of a formal program for the country.

## Categories of Assistance

U.S. mine action support encompasses four traditional pillars identified by the international community: MRE, victim assistance, mine detection and clearance, and landmine impact surveys conducted to determine the socio-economic impact of mines and UXO. The United States does not fund stockpile destruction, believing that stockpiles do not pose an immediate threat to safety and health.

A typical U.S. program might consist of assisting in the establishment of a mine action center (MAC), an MRE program, and a mine detection and clearance program. As a country develops its mine clearance capabilities, the United States, again relying on the interagency process, will periodically evaluate the development of the program to ascertain its needs and its capacity and to determine when a country achieves sustainment—the point when the host nation has demonstrated an ability to manage and coordinate all aspects of its humanitarian mine action, including using its own resources to finance mine action activities. When a country nears sustainment, U.S. support naturally diminishes, although replenishment of equipment and the provision of periodic technical assistance might still be necessary.

## U.S. Funding and Participation

The vast majority of U.S. funding support for humanitarian mine action comes from the DOS, the DoD and USAID. Until recently, CDC involvement had focused primarily on MRE, but there are indications that the CDC in the future will engage more in survivors' assistance initiatives as well.

DOS funding is provided under the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related (NADR) Programs appropriation, which is managed by the Office of Humanitarian Demining



Signs of danger.

Programs in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. These funds support both commercial and non-governmental organization (NGO) mine action initiatives within a specific country. NADR funds are also used to support programs implemented by international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS). NADR funds can also be transferred to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, directly to a U.S. Embassy or to an operational element of the DoD to support the acquisition of services and equipment. Just recently, the U.S. Congress enacted the Export Control and Foreign Operations appropriation for FY 2003, providing \$55.6 million for NADR mine action.

The DoD funds humanitarian demining activities from its Overseas Humanitarian Disaster and Civic Aid (OHDACA) account, principally to support training and equipment. OHDACA funds totaled \$21,678,000 in FY 2002. The DoD funds training conducted by the U.S. Special Forces personnel assigned to various geographic commanders-in-chief, as well as MRE initiatives. Through separate funding, the DoD funds the research and development (R&D) of promising mine detection and removal technologies.

Through the Patrick J. Leahy War Victims Fund, USAID contributes to improving the mobility, health and social

integration of the disabled due to casualties of war, including landmine survivors. USAID funds for mine action in FY 2002 totaled approximately \$8 million.

## Highlights and Accomplishments

### Quick Reaction Demining Force

Based on lessons learned from the Kosovo experience, the United States established a Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF) to respond to immediate post-conflict situations. Presently based in Mozambique, the QRDF is deployed to conduct emergency or special demining operations to assure the safety of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) or to facilitate the peace process. When the teams are not deployed in short-term, predefined missions, they perform demining missions in Mozambique.

Established in 2000, the QRDF executed its first deployed missions in Sri Lanka and Sudan in 2002. As of November 2002, the force had returned 122,348 square meters of land to safe use in Sri Lanka, destroying 980 mines and 141 pieces of UXO in the process, and allowing thousands of IDPs to safely travel throughout the country as they return to their homes. In Sudan, the QRDF conducted operations for close to six weeks, creating safe conditions for the public and reducing the number of casualties due to landmines.

■ (Left to Right) A Bosnian MDD team. A deminer in Vietnam.



**Mine Detection Dogs—Working for the Government**

The term “man’s best friend” takes on a different connotation when dogs are placed in mine-affected countries. “Man’s best friend” can be construed to be “man’s best hero” because mine detection dogs (MDDs) offer another means for the reliable detection of landmines and UXO. Mine and UXO clearance operations occur in a wide variety of climates, over a broad spectrum of terrain and under the influence of many different cultures.

While no single demining technique will be successful in all scenarios, combinations of detection technologies

and demining methods generally increase safety and efficiency and contribute to high-quality, productive mine clearance executed in accordance with international humanitarian demining standards developed by the United Nations.

There are approximately 620 MDDs around the world conducting operations or in training; 162 of these dogs are in Afghanistan. The U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program has provided dogs to 18 countries around the world: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Eritrea, Honduras, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Oman, Rwanda, Somaliland and Thailand.

**Country Program Accomplishments**

Since 1993, the United States has established humanitarian demining programs in 44 countries and will likely add more countries in 2003 and beyond. At the same time, a number of countries will “graduate” from the U.S. program, having achieved sustainment status. The United States, other donors and mine-affected countries can take pride in a number of significant accomplishments as described below.

**Afghanistan**

Among the very first of its kind, the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan has become known as an effective demining program. MRE briefings have reached over seven million people; the landmine casualty rate has been reduced by 50 percent; Afghan deminers have cleared 1,171 square kilometers of high-priority mine-infested land and destroyed 210,000 landmines and 985,000 pieces of UXO; and 1.5 million refugees have been able to return to their homes.

**Cambodia**

Except for an ability to finance its own operations, the humanitarian demining program in Cambodia is now in sustainment, with a fully trained staff of 2,400 Cambodians, 35 foreign technical advisors and six UN staff members. Deminers working under the auspices or direction of the Cambodia Mine Action Center (CMAC) have cleared 97,662,889 square meters of land, destroyed 159,789 landmines and 680,627 pieces of UXO, and reduced landmine casualties by almost 70 percent.

**Guinea-Bissau**

Since January 2000, the NGO HUMAID has cleared over half of the entire suspected mine-infested land in Guinea-Bissau, rendering 257,178 square meters mine safe. Nearly 3,000 mines and

over 13,333 pieces of UXO have been destroyed. Due to these efforts, much of the land has been transformed for productive use. Over 49,000 square meters are under cultivation for crops including cashews, beans and manioc. Homes are being built, schools are being rehabilitated and there is access once again to major industries such as the Guinea-Telecom Center.

**Jordan**

Since 1997, Jordan has proudly established an effective national mine action program, which has resulted in significant lowering of casualties. At present, Jordan is conducting technical surveys of minefields along the Syrian border. As of January 2003, Jordan’s Royal Corps of Engineers had cleared 86,123 landmines from about 200 minefields, restoring more than 3,064 acres of land to safe use.

**Laos**

U.S. Special Operations Forces soldiers have trained more than 1,200 Laotians, creating an indigenous capability to clear UXO and also the ability to train additional clearance technicians. Personnel at UXO LAO (the Lao National UXO Project) have destroyed more than 363,000 pieces of UXO and cleared more than 32,700,000 square meters of land, which now has been restored to productive agricultural use. UXO LAO personnel have also conducted mine/UXO awareness visits in more than 2,400 villages. More than 300 Laotian medical staff members have received training in emergency rehabilitation or laboratory services.

**Latin America**

Costa Rica already has declared itself “mine safe.” Three additional Central American countries—Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua—are nearing that plateau. To date, in Nicaragua, approximately 26,240 landmines have been found and destroyed by Nicaraguan deminers, allowing the government to declare 24 Nicaraguan municipalities and 168 kilometers of international borders mine safe. In total, approximately 1.9 million square meters of land have been cleared in Nicaragua. Costa Rican

deminers cleared 100,000 square meters of land. Honduras and Guatemala are expected to declare themselves mine safe within 12 to 18 months.

**Mozambique**

Since 1992, mine clearance personnel from NGOs and the Mozambican military have removed more than 17,000 landmines and 29,000 pieces of UXO, and opened more than 4,500 kilometers of roads, facilitating post-war resettlement of agricultural land and reconnecting nearly one million people with their local economies. Demining operations have also played a vital role in Mozambique’s overall development strategy. For example, the Massingir Dam project will supply electricity and irrigation to approximately nine million square meters of land, and

mines and thousands of pieces of UXO. Landmines and UXO fatalities dropped from 108 in 1994 to three in 2000. Some 400,000 refugees and 200,000 IDPs have returned to their villages.

**Conclusion**

The United States’ assistance, and that of other like-minded donors, has led to some impressive results throughout the world. Many countries are at or near sustainment, able to remove landmines on their own. Working in partnership with other donors and international organizations, the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program’s efforts will allow the citizens of many mine-affected countries to once again walk the earth in safety. ■



■ A QRDF deminer prodding the land.

the recently completed Sena Rail Line will open large areas of the Zambezi River Valley to development once reconstruction of the line is complete.

**Rwanda**

The Rwanda program is in sustainment, requiring little more than periodic equipment replenishment and technical advice. More than 200 U.S.-trained deminers and explosive ordnance disposal personnel have cleared over seven million square meters of land, including 6,000 kilometers of bush roads. In the process, they destroyed almost 27,250

*\*All photos courtesy of the author.*

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■ A landmine victim playing with a soccer ball.

