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MARMINCA's Experience: Coordinating Humanitarian Demining

Luiz Felipe Ramos Gonzalez
Guatemalan Army

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MARMINCA's Experience

COORDINATING HUMANITARIAN DEMINING



A Chilean soldier removed a landmine near the borders of Peru in Arica, Chile.

Introduction

Humanitarian demining is an essential component of mine action, which encompasses a series of activities such as mine and UXO removal, technical studies, mapping, the returning of cleared land to the communities, victim assistance, and mine risk education (MRE), among others. Since 1995, the

Organization of American States (OAS) has carried out demining programs in Central America, concentrating its efforts in four countries: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. This program has been carried out in the region with the support of donor countries, beneficiary countries, contributing countries and the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB).

The OAS, through the program known as Comprehensive Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines (AICMA for its initials in Spanish) of the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD), organizes and administers projects and channels the economic resources of donor countries to provide resources to the organizations of the beneficiary countries. The resources are then used by the beneficiary countries to organize and execute their national demining program and other mine action initiatives, as well as to support the Assistance Mission for Mine Clearance in Central America (MARMINCA).

The IADB composes the technical military component and is responsible for organizing the international team of advisers, technicians, supervisors and demining experts that make up MARMINCA. This group is responsible for the following:

- Providing training for officers and deminers
- Providing advice on technical matters
- Supervising demining operations
- Participating in the certification process of stockpile destruction operations
- Designing, implementing and providing logistic coordination of the national demining plans
- Certifying that demining operations are carried out with appropriate and reliable measures
- Ensuring the use of appropriate detection equipment, reliable detection methods and international safety standards

This team of specialists is composed of personnel from OAS member states, under the management of the IADB and the coordination of MARMINCA.

The beneficiary countries provide the deminers, which make up the national mili-

by Colonel Luis Felipe Ramos Gonzalez,
Guatemalan Army



A group of soldiers confiscates a large quantity of explosives allegedly located with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, in houses near Santa Rosa, some 255 miles southwest of Bogotá, Colombia.

tary component. This is the entity certified by the national mine action authority to carry out demining operations in each country. The work carried out by the military engineers in support of demining activities is very efficient due to the organization, discipline and training that they possess. They contribute to the execution of demining operations and the destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines. In order to reduce the number of accidents during these operations, international standards for humanitarian demining are employed. The military also supports national MRE and training activities in cooperation with the supervisors of MARMINCA.

MARMINCA's Results in Central America

The demining program in Central America has been very successful. The experiences obtained from working with the support of national officers and international supervisors has served as a framework for organizing

demining programs in countries such as Ecuador and Peru.

At the moment, demining operations are being monitored through the Assistance Mission for Mine Clearance in South America (MARMINAS) with the support of supervisors from Brazil, Honduras and Nicaragua. In order to carry out the monitoring of operations, the supervisors trained national army officers so they can plan, coordinate and supervise demining operations. The support that the military has given to demining operations has ensured the success of programs throughout the Americas. The countries that are signatories to the Ottawa Convention and that carry out mine action activities are supported by their military forces in reaching the objective of clearing mined areas and consequentially minimizing mine accidents so that the populations can utilize the land without risk.

Military personnel from different regions of the world have acquired vast experience in mine action activities. Their support is of great importance and has contributed to a country's goal of becoming mine free, which

in turn has permitted refugees to return to their land of origin and contributed to the development of their country. During my time as commander of MARMINCA (one year and four months), I witnessed the importance of the support of the armed forces to activities related to humanitarian demining, which has contributed, in turn, to the development of mine-affected countries.

** Photos c/o AP.*

Contact Information

Colonel Luis Felipe Ramos Gonzalez
Guatemalan Army
Guatemala

Inter-American Defense Board
Public Affairs Office
2600 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20441
USA
Tel: (202) 646-1333
Fax: (202) 939-6620
E-mail: pao@jid.org