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Colombia Humanitarian Demining Planning Workshop - Executive Summary

Taller de Planificación del Desminado Humanitario en Colombia

Colombia Humanitarian Demining Planning Workshop

Radisson Royal Hotel - Bogotá, Colombia

Executive Summary Overview

From 9 to 12 June 2009, representatives of the Colombian government's humanitarian mine action office and the Humanitarian Demining Department of the Colombian military met to devise a way forward in planning for the expansion and enhancement of the country's program to eradicate landmines from the national territory.

The Mine Action Information Center at James Madison University facilitated the Colombia Humanitarian Demining Planning Workshop (*Taller de Planificación del Desminado Humanitario en Colombia*) in Bogotá, Colombia. The workshop was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, and was attended by representatives from the U.S. and Colombian governments, international organizations, and key stakeholders in Colombia's work against landmines.

More than 40 participants worked together to draft a Plan of Action for Colombian humanitarian demining activities. They will use the plan as a guiding document for developing future mine-action activities. The plan emphasized integration and cooperation among military forces, national authorities, and international partners.

The workshop opened with speeches from Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos Calderón and Andrés Dávila, director of the *Programa Presidencial de Acción Integral contra las Minas Antipersonal* (PPAICMA, the Presidential Program for Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Landmines). Presentations by international counterparts from the Organization of American States, Jordan's National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation, Mines Advisory Group, the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Southern Command, and the Colombian military forces followed.

Working groups discussed the requirements for expanded mine clearance operations and how to manage and use information gathered by survey and demining teams. The groups developed a 13-point Plan of Action, which was presented to a closing session of about 100 dignitaries and representatives from mine-action organizations, diplomatic missions to Colombia, and landmine survivors. The Plan of Action sets some milestones with dates for achieving elements of plan (underlined in the list below, all for later in 2009), but the agreement requires a commitment from the Colombian participants to follow up with continued planning and initiatives to implement the items specified and to

meet the ultimate goal of developing an expanded and enhanced humanitarian mine action program in the country.

The closing session was addressed by the Honorable William Brownfield, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, and Sergio Jaramillo, Colombian Vice Minister of Defense. COL (ret) Dennis Barlow, director of the Mine Action Information Center, and Andrés Dávila, the Director of PPAICMA, also made closing statements encouraging continued action in furtherance of the plan agreed at the workshop.

The Plan of Action

Workshop participants broke into working groups to scrutinize challenges facing Colombian mine action and consider ways of addressing these issues. Topics for discussion were divided into two main areas of focus: information requirements for setting priorities and planning operations, and command-and-control and security requirements for developing an increased national mine clearance capacity. Each of the groups was given a list of preliminary questions to generate discussion. After nearly two days of discussions, the two working groups met in a plenary meeting to discuss their findings and prepare a final Plan of Action for presentation the following day.

In addition to discussing items of concern, the working groups were tasked with identifying resources and training required to implement proposed actions and stakeholders to include in any planning and activities that emerge from the specified actions.

Participants recognized the following 13 items of concern in the Plan of Action:

1. **Growth considerations for demining platoons:** Over the next three years, there will be an estimated growth from 6 to 14 demining platoons. There will need to be plans for addressing equipment needs, identifying and utilizing personnel, training needs, and location requirements for the increased personnel and equipment.

By 1 September, planners will have an understanding of the mechanical requirements in Colombia, and by 1 December, the Colombian military will identify and train personnel for three platoons. This expansion will require an estimated US\$600,000 for equipment, as well as costs associated with sustaining and maintaining an expanded capacity.

2. **Mechanical enhancements:** With increased demining capacity, there will be a need to integrate mechanical capabilities to enhance operational effectiveness. Areas of operation will need to be identified, protocols for the use of the equipment must be developed (factoring for different types and usages for equipment), mechanical enhancements must be integrated with other demining methods (such as mine-detecting dogs), and planners must account for the

increased personnel required to maintain the capacity of mechanical operations.

By 1 October, a statement of requirements for machines will be developed. A list of areas in need of equipment will be identified, and an appraisal visit from Ft. Belvoir (NVESD), other donors, nongovernmental organizations, and other governments will be scheduled. Participants identified a demining machine (mini-Minewolf), the appraisal visit, and maintenance and operating costs as resources required for this action item.

3. **Prioritization of work areas:** Stakeholders in Colombia need to prioritize work areas and coordinate areas with relevant organizations, develop updated area impact studies, establish milestones based on increases in demining platoons' capabilities, and ensure the appropriate employment of units.

To address concerns with prioritization, impact survey teams need to be trained so they can confirm information (with possible support of NGOs in certain areas or with certain activities). Information from the survey teams must be collected and distributed to stakeholders. The information from the Landmine Impact Survey must also be analyzed, future zones of work must be established based on criteria from Fusion Centers (offices that bring together government agencies and military units involved in security and development for a particular area), and multiple projects should be planned in the same geographic region to maximize the employment of demining platoons.

4. **Resource mobilization:** The working group members emphasized the need to develop an overview of the resource requirements of humanitarian demining operations by sector for the next three years. The overview will be useful in requesting assistance from Colombian programs as well as international donors. The base financial needs of the Presidential Program (PPAICMA) will be included, as well as additional costs associated with impact studies, new mechanical tools, mine-detecting dogs, and additional human resources and capabilities. The overview will be useful to international partners and for long-term, multi-year funding requests.

A statement of financial requirements will need to be developed, and should identify Colombian resources, shortfalls by sector, and focus on long-term, multi-year funding plans. PPAICMA and the OAS will work to create a long-term funding strategy for presentation to donors.

5. **Mine-detecting dogs:** It is imperative that the abilities of mine-detecting dogs be enhanced to support humanitarian demining. The Colombian military already has MDDs for military operations, but there is a need to adapt and improve the capacity for humanitarian demining.

A statement should be developed to outline the requirement, evaluating the existing capacity and how it can be adapted. Specific training and procedures will

need to be established, and planning for a pilot program should begin. The Army's canine program was recognized as a resource, as were other organizations with similar programs.

6. **Command and control:** National command-and-control mechanisms must be strengthened to allow PPAICMA and the military command to adapt more quickly to the changing needs of the demining platoons, and to better accommodate expansions of the program. The current structure has been modified, but needs to be formalized, especially in anticipation of the growth to 14 demining platoons.

Participants suggested created a humanitarian demining command for the 14 platoons, with August set as a tentative timeframe to submit a proposal to this effect to the Commander of the Armed Forces. A resolution would be submitted in September, and the new command will tentatively be planned for a December start date. Protocols and procedures should also be developed to emphasize interagency cooperation (especially with Fusion Centers).

7. **Information gathering:** Participants recognized a need to break down barriers in the information-gathering process, which is impeded by factors that include security, geography, and a lack of resources. Although a considerable amount of data is available, it often cannot be corroborated, collated, or integrated across information management systems. Survey teams need to be increased to improve data collection. A channel between the military and other information center should be created to facilitate information sharing, and information should be analyzed for accuracy and relevancy.

As resources are being committed to information-gathering tasks, emphasis should be placed on integrating the activities into other demining tasks so that areas can be prioritized effectively and proper methodologies can be adopted based on the areas of operation. Organizations with an interest in adequate information should participate in a working group, which can help coordinate personnel, training, equipment, and logistical support.

8. **Incorporating IMSMA:** The information management working group identified the effective operation of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) as vital to humanitarian demining activities in Colombia. Information being added to IMSMA is overseen by PPAICMA, but as progress is made this information will be increasingly available to the military, social organizations, international organizations and NGOs. PPAICMA is leading the efforts to verify information being added to IMSMA, and has made this available on its Web site.

The working group emphasized the need to make the IMSMA information available to people in the field (via IMSMA mobile) and to make the editing of information available to more users. Irrelevant or non-priority information should be removed when possible to improve reports and prioritization.

9. **Effective use of information:** Primary information is not always available in the field, so platoons do not always have a clear understanding of the sites that should be demined or cleared. Protocols for information verification should be established, and training procedures should be standardized so that those accessing the information are able to understand it. Demining teams that are currently operating, and those that will be available in the future, can also be used to gather information and prioritize tasks; however, an information-control component is imperative to the effective use of the information.

Participants suggested strengthening the country's information-management capacity by establishing protocols and procedures for demining and information-gathering teams. Managers must also ensure that adequate operational data is being provided to teams, and that the information flow is productive, so that the system is operating effectively.

10. **Information requirements for planning operations and priority setting:** While the main prioritization tool for operations is the information in the IMSMA database, the secondary tool is information provided by communities that are returning to their lands. There is a need to establish a set of criteria for prioritization (security, geography, land use), and adequate information will be needed to establish these criteria and implement them when planning operations commence.

The working groups suggested more impact studies, establishing a set of criteria for land release, and considering the use of new techniques to increase the capacity of impact studies (e.g., mine-detecting dogs can be used in conjunction with surveys, and mechanical demining can be used in appropriate situations). Participants noted the success of various NGOs in this area and will be investigating further. The Mine Action Information Center was cited as a resource for input on casualty data studies conducted for proper information management.

11. **Planning for additional survey teams:** As more demining platoons are created, there must be a simultaneous increase in the number of survey teams. These new survey teams should employ a mixture of general and technical survey methodologies, with NGOs possibly providing supplementary support to military teams (activities to be coordinated by PPAICMA).

With additional survey resources, a survey capacity could be added to the demining platoons to augment in-field capabilities and collect better information. Organizations that have built such teams will be studied so that best practices can be devised. PPAICMA and the Humanitarian Demining Department of the Colombian military will work together to devise a protocol for, organization of, and tools required for these teams. Once the protocol has been established, the survey teams should be trained and deployed simultaneously with new platoons.

12. Integrating community liaisons: Community liaisons were seen as a vital component for humanitarian demining. Although a structure for such a system has not been devised, participants were interested in a hybridized military/civilian approach until a more formal structure could be implemented. Regardless, it is important to analyze the situation in each area so that an appropriate team can be formed.

Appropriate protocols for information gathering and community liaison use must be established so that community liaisons can be customized based on needs. Non-conflict areas will receive the first priority, and organizations already operating effectively in certain areas will be sought to make use of preexisting access. A draft instrument, prepared through collaboration between PPAICMA and the Ministry of Defense, was scheduled for August.

13. Coordinating victim assistance, clearance, mine-risk education and platoon activities: There are numerous informal mechanisms for coordinating these activities, but none of them are comprehensive. Department committees, national information tables, the Intersectorial Commission for Action against Antipersonnel Mines, and other venues provide important but limited opportunities for coordination.

PPAICMA will look for a regular venue to allow interaction and coordination between major stakeholders. This venue will establish a program for regular exchanges and meetings, and will ensure that donors are informed on a regular basis about the meetings and progress being made. A preliminary agenda was to be circulated with proposed dates and participants by 1 July.