
VICE-PRESIDENCY OF COLOMBIA
PRESIDENTIAL PROGRAM FOR MINE ACTION (PAICMA)

D06. DESTRUCTION OF MINED FIELDS IN COLOMBIA

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude for the support given to Colombia during the organization of the “Cartagena Summit on a Mine-free World”. This support has allowed us to hold this second review of the progress and tasks pending in terms of mine action.

During the past five years since the Convention entered into force, the Colombian Government’s main achievement was the design and development of an institutional, technical and operational platform to remove mined fields in accordance with the highest international standards. This job was entrusted to the Military Forces, given their knowledge of the territory, logistic skills and experience developing these activities in a scenario of violence executed by Illegal Armed Groups.

Thus, the Humanitarian Demining Office was created in 2005 as part of the Armed Forces General Command, currently with seven humanitarian demining squads. Thanks to these men’s commitment, 27 of the 34 military bases reported as mined areas have been cleared, and the remaining 4 are expected to be cleared by the end of 2010, before the expiration of the 10 year deadline established by article 5 of the Convention.

I’d like to highlight the international community’s support with the logistic, financial and technical aspects, thanks to which the areas cleared by the squads have now been granted a quality certificate by the Inter-American Defence Board of the Organization of American States.

However, unlike other parts of the world where mines are a silent remainder of old armed confrontations, Illegal Armed Groups in Colombia continue to use these artefacts indiscriminately, affecting communities and halting the economic and social development opportunities of the contaminated areas.

As far as clearing of areas mined by Illegal Armed Groups is concerned, the Colombian Government is aware of the large task ahead. A reminder of this is that 707 of the 1,099 of the country’s municipalities have registered some kind of event with antipersonnel mines used by Illegal Armed Groups.

On the other hand, given the lack of conventional mined fields with antipersonnel mine sowing patterns, and the handcrafted nature of these artefacts with constant innovations in the materials and technologies used, tracking them down and destructing them is particularly complex. The above represents Colombia's challenges in regards to the new ways of production and use of antipersonnel mines

Another problem is the fact that a dynamic and changing scenario with new antipersonnel mines being planted by illegal armed groups makes the estimation of suspicious areas more difficult, and at the same time it forces to do planning exercises in completely uncertain scenarios. During the last few months the Colombian work team has faced a great challenge to understand and quantify the real magnitude of the antipersonnel mines issue in the country. Right now we are committed with the design of a work plan, which we will present in March, 2010, in order to request an extension to fulfil our obligations regarding Article V of the Convention.

Meanwhile, the Colombian Government has decided to focus its current clearing capacity to the most affected areas. Thanks to these efforts, 246.112 m² have been cleared in 6 of the most affected municipalities in the country. However, we know that it is not enough. Therefore, during the next few years we will invest heavily in capacities within a long-term strategy to contain the territory's contamination.

By 2011 Colombia will have a total of 14 humanitarian demining squads, for which an investment of \$40 million dollars is planned in order to operate, mobilize and monitor their work. The manual demining squads' actions are supported by canine and mechanical demining units which altogether make the Humanitarian Demining Battalion. Twelve of the squads will focus on meeting the humanitarian demining needs of the 12 most affected departments in the country, while the remaining two will focus on the rest of the territory, within an emergency humanitarian demining framework.

On the other hand, in order to complement the Military Forces' capacity, the Colombian Government has decided to modify the national legislation in order to adopt a new set of rules that allows all civil organizations to execute humanitarian demining projects if they are able to demonstrate their competence performing this type of activities successfully. Likewise, the Colombian Government will determine these organizations' operation conditions, given the ongoing situation of violence. In this regard, the national Government values and highlights the support offered by social organizations and donor countries to join this process. Given their magnitude, the rules to be issued during the next few months will contemplate the most significant technical aspects, particularly the accreditation functions, as well as the adoption of standards and quality control.



All these challenges will require the support of international cooperation, so that we may further strengthen the technical demining capacities, the social and economical recovery of affected areas and the full reestablishment of the rights violated by the presence of such artefacts. Thus, Colombia wants to honour its commitment with humanity, and therefore asks for the international community's understanding and support, in the sense that a mine-free world is, first and foremost, a shared commitment.