

COLOMBIA



ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE: 1 MARCH 2021
 (NOT ON TRACK TO MEET DEADLINE)

MINE ACTION PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

For 2016

For 2015

MINE ACTION PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE	For 2016	For 2015
Problem understood	5	5
Target date for completion of mine clearance	5	6
Targeted clearance	6	6
Efficient clearance	5	6
National funding of programme	7	7
Timely clearance	5	6
Land release system in place	5	7
National mine action standards	7	7
Reporting on progress	6	6
Improving performance	7	8
PERFORMANCE SCORE: AVERAGE	5.8	6.4

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

Colombia's agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC) gave momentum to its demining efforts in 2016 and the Colombian Congress's ratification of the peace deal in November 2016 was expected to further spur mine action across the country, particularly in areas primarily occupied by FARC that were previously off limits to clearance organisations. However, bureaucratic obstacles and poor coordination and tasking are impeding efficient mine survey and clearance and putting in jeopardy the peace dividend for mine action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **Colombia should take advantage of the peace process with the FARC to conduct a baseline survey of contamination and to accelerate significantly clearance of remaining mined areas in accordance with its obligations under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC).**
- **As part of this process, Colombia should promote, in consultation with its demining partners, appropriate land release methodologies, including through use of mine detection dogs (MDDs) and mechanical demining assets.**
- **Colombia's mine action programme authorities urgently need to improve data management and planning procedures.**
- **Colombia needs to streamline procedures for accreditation, tasking, and Quality Assurance (QA) and apply them consistently to all operators.**

CONTAMINATION

Colombia's mine problem is the result of decades of conflict with non-state armed groups. The precise extent of contamination remains highly uncertain, though at least 30 of Colombia's 32 departments are suspected to have a mine threat.¹ As at mid-2017, Colombia still lacked a meaningful understanding of contamination, although its new strategic plan for 2016–21, which is based on a national estimate of 51km² of mined area, aims to elaborate a national baseline.²

Colombia continues to report on "events" included in its database, which include unconfirmed media reports, such as of victims and minelaying. Its Article 7 transparency report for 2016 reported that 647 suspected mined areas were recorded between 1990 and the end of 2016, a reduction from the 671 recorded as at the end of 2015.³ Of these, 100 were in Antioquia, believed to be the most affected department. Colombia systematically attributed 5,000m² to each "confirmed hazardous area".⁴ In January 2017, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) reported that incidents involving mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) have been reported in 673 of Colombia's 1,122 municipalities since 1990. Based on the Directorate for Comprehensive Mine Action (Dirección para la Acción Integral contra minas Antipersonal, DAICMA) analysis of incident trends, of those 673, 199 are considered to be highly impacted (type I), 291 moderately impacted (type II), and 183 suffer from low impact (type III).⁵

The HALO Trust believes that Colombia's mine problem has certain unique features. Locally produced mines were planted in isolated rural areas by non-state armed group (NSAG) factions to protect strategic positions; often coca cultivations whose crops were used to fund operations. When the groups moved on, the mines were left behind, blocking access to roads, paths, schools, and other civilian infrastructure, preventing productive use of land.⁶

On 7 March 2015, negotiators for the Government of Colombia and the FARC announced that agreement had been reached by the two parties on demining.⁷ According to a joint statement, the government and the FARC would select a number of pilot zones with the highest level of threat from anti-personnel mines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), UXO, or other explosive remnants of war (ERW). Following signature in August 2015 of an agreement with the European Union for support to the Pilot Project on Humanitarian Demining, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) was overseeing non-technical survey of suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) and technical survey and clearance of confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs).⁸

According to The HALO Trust, mines "continue to have a huge effect on the civilian population, causing physical harm, preventing farming and affecting livelihoods." Through the rapid response intervention plan implemented in 2016, 119 high-impact municipalities have been prioritised for intervention with a further 474 medium- and low-impact municipalities earmarked for intervention before 2021.⁹ The organisation believes that mine action is integral to efforts to rebuild the lives of the six million internally displaced people and 8 million registered victims of conflict in Colombia. This is because land restitution claims are unable to be processed if land is deemed to be dangerous. By declaring municipalities free from mine threat, HALO Trust observes that it is providing the "fundamental first step" towards facilitating the safe return of the displaced.¹⁰

Colombia reported 84 new mine victims in 2016, a sharp reduction on the total of 217 reported for 2015.¹¹

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Since 2002, the national mine action programme has been overseen by the National Interministerial Commission on Anti-Personnel Mine Action (Comisión Intersectorial Nacional para la Acción contra Minas Antipersonal, CINAMAP).¹² CINAMAP serves as the national mine action authority. Two other institutions – the Victims Unit and the Land Restitution Unit – were established subsequently.

In September 2014, Decree 1649 created DAICMA to replace the earlier mine action body, the Presidential Programme for Comprehensive Mine Action (PAICMA).¹³ DAICMA effectively serves as the national mine action centre.

DAICMA's ability to coordinate came under added scrutiny in 2016 and 2017 as it has been locking in operators to tasks before the extent of the challenge is known and without a clear appreciation of operators' future capacities. This has resulted in teams sometimes lying idle, significantly reducing efficiency. Under Article 6(8) of the APMBC, states parties receiving international assistance are obliged to cooperate with a view to ensuring the full and prompt implementation of agreed assistance programmes. In August 2017, DAICMA became DAICMA – Descontamina Colombia.¹⁴

Strategic Planning

Colombia's APMBC Article 5 deadline extension request projected, improbably, that all mined areas would be released by 2020.¹⁵ Colombia's 2011–13 operational plan was to address 6,000 dangerous and mined areas in 14 of 660 municipalities where the presence of mines is suspected covering an estimated 15km².¹⁶ Colombia did not attain those targets.

Colombia was due to submit an operational plan for 2014–20 at the Thirteenth Meeting of States Parties in December 2013, but did not do so. Colombia did present a demining "action plan" for 2014–16 at the Third APMBC Review Conference in Maputo in July 2014.¹⁷ The plan foresaw a first phase of mine action in 91 municipalities and steadily increasing national army demining capacity to 54 units, as well as the number of non-technical survey teams to 15 by 2016.¹⁸

Colombia developed a five-year strategic plan for 2016–21. Among the primary aims set out in the plan are consolidation of the mine action sector and the elaboration of a detailed baseline of contamination.¹⁹ The operational plan has assigned responsibility for 63 highly impacted and prioritised municipalities to a range of civilian and military humanitarian demining operators.

Standards

New national mine action standards have been elaborated, including on MDDs and machines.²⁰ The HALO Trust and other mine action operators in Colombia are working closely with the national authorities to raise standards for all elements of demining operations, including manual clearance and the introduction of mechanical demining.²¹

Information Management

Poor information management has been a feature of Colombia's mine action programme since its inception. While lack of access has undoubtedly played a role in this, efforts to verify and consolidate meaningful mine action data have proved inadequate. Government decree 1649 of 2014 assigned to DAICMA responsibility for maintaining the IMSMA database and to "compile, systematise, centralise, and update relevant information" to serve as a basis for programme planning.²² This remains a central challenge for the programme. NPA has been supporting DAICMA on information management with a full-time expert seconded to the Directorate.²³

Operators

The Armed Forces former Humanitarian Demining Battalion (BIDES), now Humanitarian Demining Brigade (Brigada de Desminado Humanitario (BRDH)), has been conducting humanitarian demining since 2005, when it began clearance of 35 military bases. It completed the clearance in 2010.²⁴

In 2013, The HALO Trust became the first non-governmental organisation (NGO) to conduct demining in Colombia when it began clearance operations at the El Morro minefield, Nariño municipality, in Antioquia department.²⁵ In 2015–16, HALO Trust Colombia was conducting survey, mine clearance, risk education, and some victim assistance. Its main office was in Bogotá and operations were taking place in eight municipalities across three departments: Antioquia, Meta, and Tolima. Based on the peace agreement, DAICMA assigned HALO Trust 14 rapid-response municipalities for immediate post-conflict intervention. As at March 2017, HALO Trust was also conducting operations in Cauca and Valle del Cauca and had in addition been authorised to begin operations in the departments of Nariño and Putumayo bringing the total number of municipalities assigned to the organization to 27.²⁶

NPA formally initiated a mine action programme in April 2015, having taken part in the peace talks between the government and the FARC that concerned demining. The first step in the process of implementing the agreement on demining was to conduct non-technical survey of suspected contamination in the departments of Meta and Antioquia. The parties chose two pilot projects, one in the village of El Orejón (Antioquia) and a second in the village of Santa Helena (Meta). NPA's role has been to lead and supervise a mine clearance project as a trust-building exercise between the Government of Colombia and the FARC. The Colombian army has been conducting the mine clearance as such, with NPA providing verification with two MDD teams, while the FARC has given information on contaminated areas.²⁷

In 2017, NPA was supporting the Demining Brigade with its MDD and dog handler training, including by sourcing funds for a project to support their puppy and breeding project. It also hoped to finalise an agreement with the FARC on including staff from Humanicemos, the FARC demining organisation being established, into NPA training and teams for deployment to Briceño municipality.²⁸

The Organization of American States (OAS) serves as the monitoring body for humanitarian demining in Colombia; procedures in place for the approval of tasks, plans, and standing operating procedures (SOPs) have been questioned. NPA, for instance, waited 127 days for approval to use its mechanical assets, with MDD assets standing idle as a result, despite the dog teams having already been accredited.²⁹

Since 2010, UNMAS has been advising DAICMA (and its predecessor). UNMAS's aims for 2016 were threefold: to increase the capacity of the authorities to manage, coordinate, and regulate the mine action sector; to develop the sector to support peace and development initiatives ("particularly ensuring that civilian and humanitarian demining organizations are operating under an adequate quality management framework"); and to support the peace process.³⁰ UNMAS was hoping for significant progress in non-technical survey during 2017, in order to facilitate the planning of efficient and effective clearance operations. In order to minimise the cost of demining Colombia, UNMAS argues, the efficiency of operations must improve. This could usefully include the use of MDDs.³¹

LAND RELEASE

Colombia cleared less than 0.3km² of mined area in 2016, a decrease on clearance output in 2015 of 0.35km². Operations in 2016 included destruction of 210 anti-personnel mines.

Survey in 2016

In 2016, The HALO Trust conducted survey in the departments of Antioquia (in the municipalities of Abejorral, Argelia, El Carmen de Viboral, Nariño, San Rafael, and Sonson); Meta (Mesetas, San Juan de Arama, and Vistahermosa municipalities); and Tolima (Ataco, Chapparal, Planadas, and Rioblanco).³² Survey identified 289,219m² of hazardous area across a total of 53 CHAs and SHAs.³³

In 2016, NPA coordinated the completion of demining by BIDES in two communities. One was El Orejón in the municipality of Briceño in Antioquia where 4,022m² of area was surveyed, while the second was in Santa Helena in the municipality of Mesetas, in the department of Meta, where 19,624m² was surveyed.³⁴ NPA also initiated independent non-technical survey in 2016, at Vista Hermosa in the municipality of Mesetas; this subsequently led to identification of CHAs that were due to be cleared in the course of 2017.³⁵

Clearance in 2016

Colombia reported clearance of 287,661m² in 2016 across six departments: Antioquia, Bolivar, Caldas, Meta, Santander, and Tolima. DAICMA had expected to initiate clearance operations in 20 new municipalities over the course of 2016.³⁶

Table 1: Mine clearance in 2016³⁷

Province	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
Antioquia	161,641	121	4
Bolivar	16,671	20	7
Caldas	35,349	18	0
Meta	20,874	19	1
Santander	53,059	32	1
Tolima	67	0	1
Totals	287,661	210	14

AP = Anti-personnel

In 2016, HALO Trust conducted clearance in the departments of Antioquia (in the municipalities of El Carmen de Viboral, Nariño, San Rafael, and Sonson); Meta (San Juan de Arama municipality); and Tolima (Ataco municipality), reporting clearance of 115,628m² with the destruction of 90 anti-personnel mines and 2 items of UXO.³⁸ On 15 October 2016, the municipality of Nariño was handed over to the local population by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and The HALO Trust. Nariño is free of the threat of anti-personnel mines, the first time a civilian organisation has freed a municipality from explosive contamination.³⁹

On 21 and 22 December 2016, NPA, together with DAICMA, BIDES, the FARC, and the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, handed over cleared areas in El Orejón in the municipality of Briceño, in the north-east of the country, after clearance of 19,849m² that included the destruction of 46 anti-personnel mines.⁴⁰

Deminer Safety

In June 2017, NPA staff had to leave Santa Helena, Mesetas municipality in Meta department, due to direct threats from a dissident FARC faction.⁴¹

Progress in 2017

In March 2017, HALO Trust was close to initiating non-technical survey in two further departments: Cauca and Valle del Cauca.⁴² Government restrictions on the use of explosives by NGOs had been limiting the capability to tackle Colombia's UXO threat but HALO Trust was planning

to introduce thermite burning devices, manufactured in New Zealand, to enable safe destruction of ERW without the use of explosives.⁴³ By the end of the year, HALO Trust hoped to have doubled the size of its personnel.⁴⁴

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Under Article 5 of the APMB (and in accordance with the ten-year extension granted by states parties in 2010), Colombia is required to destroy all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, but not later than 1 March 2021.

It is not on target to meet the deadline, although the national Mine Action Strategic Plan 2016–2021 still envisions that Colombia will fulfil its mine survey and clearance obligations by 2021.

The peace agreement has the potential to be a great success for Colombia. The HALO Trust has, though,

seen a reduction in funding to "legacy" projects in departments such as Antioquia that predate the peace deal even though many communities in those regions are still greatly impacted by mine contamination. The HALO Trust is making a concerted effort to ensure that these legacy projects receive the funding they need to make sure the job is completed.⁴⁵

As at September 2017, the Government of Colombia was in negotiations with the now largest active guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN),⁴⁶ with mine action a point of discussion, which is a positive signal for the future importance of mine action in Colombia.⁴⁷

- 1 United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), "UNMAS in Colombia", February 2016, at: <http://www.mineaction.org/programmes/colombia>.
- 2 Article 7 Report (for 2015), Form D.
- 3 Article 7 Reports (for 2015 and 2016), Form D.
- 4 Article 7 Report (for 2015), Form D.
- 5 UNMAS, "UNMAS in Colombia", accessed 10 January 2017 at: <http://www.mineaction.org/programmes/colombia>.
- 6 Email from Chris Ince, Programme Manager, HALO Trust Colombia, 28 May 2016.
- 7 See, e.g., C. Voelkel, "Demining the Path to Peace in Colombia", International Crisis Group, 10 March 2015, at: <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/latinamerica/2015/03/10/demining-the-path-to-peace-in-colombia/>.
- 8 "Acuerdo Sobre Limpieza y Descontaminación del Territorio de la Presencia de Minas Antipersonal (MAP), Artefactos Explosivos Improvisados (AEI) y Municiones Sin Explotar (MUSE) o Restos Explosivos de Guerra (REG) en general" ("Agreement on clearance of areas contaminated with anti-personnel mines, IEDs, and ERW"), Joint Statement #52, Havana, 7 March 2015, at: <https://www.mesadeconversaciones.com.co/comunicados/comunicadoconjunto-52-la-habana-7-de-marzo-de-2015>; and email from Zlatko Vezilic, NPA, 5 November 2015. See also T. Solberg Johansen, "Mine Action agreement with the EU for Colombia", 8 December 2015, at: <https://www.npaid.org/News/News-archive/2015/Mine-Action-agreement-with-the-EU-for-Colombia>.
- 9 Email from Oliver Ford, Programme Support Officer, HALO Trust Colombia, 14 September 2017.
- 10 Email from Chris Ince, HALO Trust Colombia, 28 May 2016.
- 11 Article 7 Reports (for 2015 and 2016), Form D.
- 12 Law No. 759/2002, 30 July 2002.
- 13 Article 7 Report (for 2014), Form A.
- 14 See: <http://www.accioncontraminas.gov.co/direccion/Paginas/Quienes-Somos.aspx>.
- 15 Revised Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 13 August 2010, p. 66.
- 16 Government of Colombia, Plan de Acción de Desminado Humanitario 2014–2016, undated but 2014 (hereafter, Humanitarian Demining Action Plan 2014–16).
- 17 Statement of Colombia, 13th Meeting of States Parties, December 2013.
- 18 Statement of Colombia, Third Review Conference, June 2014.
- 19 Article 7 Report (for 2015), Form D.
- 20 Email from Vanessa Finson, Programme Manager, Humanitarian Disarmament – Colombia, NPA, 14 March 2017.
- 21 Email from Oliver Ford, HALO Trust Colombia, 14 September 2017.
- 22 Article 7 Report (for 2014), Form C.
- 23 Email from Vanessa Finson, NPA, 14 March 2017.
- 24 PAICMA, "Desminado Humanitario", undated but accessed 1 April 2014 at: <http://www.accioncontraminas.gov.co/accion/Paginas/Desminado.aspx>.
- 25 HALO Trust, "HALO starts humanitarian demining operations in Colombia", 24 September 2013, at: <http://www.halotrust.org/node/666>.
- 26 Email from Harriet Houlsby, Programme Coordinator, HALO Trust Colombia, 17 March 2017.
- 27 Email from Fredrik Holmegaard, Project Manager, Humanitarian Disarmament – Colombia, NPA, 13 June 2016.
- 28 Email from Vanessa Finson, NPA, 14 March 2017.
- 29 Email from Vanessa Finson, NPA, 12 September 2017.
- 30 UNMAS, "UNMAS in Colombia", February 2016.
- 31 UNMAS, "UNMAS in Colombia", January 2017.
- 32 Email from Harriet Houlsby, HALO Trust, 17 March 2017.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Email from Vanessa Finson, NPA, 14 March 2017.
- 35 Article 7 Report (for 2014), Form C.
- 36 Article 7 Report (for 2015), Form D.
- 37 Article 7 Report (for 2016), Form D.
- 38 Email from Harriet Houlsby, HALO Trust, 17 March 2017.
- 39 HALO Trust, "First municipality in Colombia rendered free of landmines by a civilian organisation handed over", 17 October 2016, at: <https://www.halotrust.org/media-centre/news/first-municipality-in-colombia-rendered-free-of-landmines-by-a-civilian-organisation-handed-over/>.
- 40 NPA, "Handover of cleared land", 10 January 2017, at: <https://www.npaid.org/content/view/full/21449>.
- 41 Email from Vanessa Finson, NPA, 12 September 2017.
- 42 Email from Harriet Houlsby, HALO Trust, 17 March 2017.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 See, e.g., Reuters, "Colombia Expects Tough Peace Negotiations With ELN Rebels", *Voice of America*, 13 September 2017, at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/colombia-sees-peace-with-eln-rebels-harder-than-farc/4027737.html>.
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