

ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE BAN CONVENTION ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE: 1 MARCH 2021 NOT ON TRACK TO MEET DEADLINE

KEY DATA

ANTI-PERSONNEL (AP)
MINE CONTAMINATION:

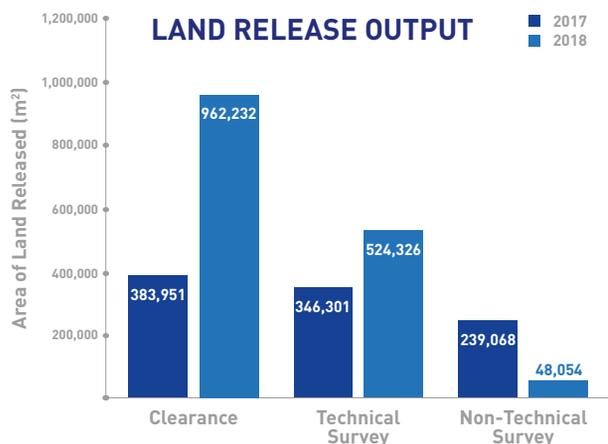
MEDIUM, 10 KM²
(ESTIMATED)

AP MINE CLEARANCE IN 2018

962,232 M²

AP MINES DESTROYED IN 2018

322



CURRENT LIKELIHOOD OF MEETING 2025 CLEARANCE TARGET (as per Maputo +15 Political Declaration aspiration): **LOW**

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Following the Presidential election in August 2018, Descontamina Colombia was reallocated to the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and a new leadership appointed. It is expected that changes will be made to the mine action programme in 2019 and beyond with a new mine action strategy being developed and a new prioritisation model being implemented. However, the sector continues to face numerous challenges, not least because of a worsening security situation that restricts access to the most heavily contaminated mined areas and reports of new anti-personnel mines being emplaced.

Colombia is not on track to meet its current Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) Article 5 deadline and has

stated that it will request a second extension in 2020. Mine Action Review believes that this extension should be only an interim request to better determine the baseline of anti-personnel mine contamination. In order to meet this new date, Descontamina Colombia will need to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the demining programme by making much needed improvements to information management and reporting, land release methodologies, quality management, and task prioritisation. Colombia continues to be without an accurate baseline of anti-personnel mine contamination, making it difficult to measure progress, not least because its reporting of survey and clearance is inaccurate.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Colombia should conduct a baseline survey to elaborate a meaningful understanding of contamination and to accelerate significantly clearance of remaining mined areas in accordance with its obligations under APMBC Article 5.
- Colombia should report more accurately and consistently on land released through survey and clearance and rely on survey rather than “events” to understand anti-personnel mine contamination.
- Colombia should elaborate its land release national mine action standard (NMAS) and correctly implement both its technical survey and new quality management NMAS. Operators should be supported to use the full toolbox of land release methodologies to ensure they are conducting efficient survey and clearance.
- Colombia should elaborate a gender policy and implementation plan for mine action.
- Colombia should engage more positively with civilian operators, particularly in its strategic planning processes, tasking them in a manner that ensures the best use of resources and prioritises the highest impact areas in response to humanitarian and community needs.
- Quality management of operations should be enhanced and applied equally to all operators, including the military.

ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

Criterion	Score (2018)	Performance Commentary
UNDERSTANDING OF CONTAMINATION (20% of overall score)	3	There is no accurate estimate of anti-personnel mine contamination in Colombia. While the security situation makes access to some contaminated areas difficult, there has been no systematic survey undertaken of accessible areas, nor is there a plan to do so. There have also been reports of new mines being emplaced.
NATIONAL OWNERSHIP & PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT (10% of overall score)	6	Following the election of President Duque, Descontamina Colombia was without a director for six months. Operators have reported that slow decision-making and approval processes at the national level have delayed survey and clearance. In early 2019, Descontamina was reallocated to the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace and a new leadership appointed. However, most decisions related to mine clearance remain with the <i>Instancia de Desminado</i> , led by the Ministry of Defence.
GENDER (10% of overall score)	6	Descontamina does not have gender or diversity policy and implementation plan but certain minority groups do have legal protections. In 2019, a female lead for Descontamina was appointed. In total, women make up 63% of staff in the national authority.
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT & REPORTING (10% of overall score)	4	Poor information management and reporting continues to be a problem. Colombia relies on "events" where more recent survey data is unavailable to determine anti-personnel mine contamination, prioritisation, and planning despite their unreliability. Some capacity and improvement of information management systems has taken place. However, Colombia's Article 7 report for 2018 contained inconsistent land release figures.
PLANNING AND TASKING (10% of overall score)	4	Colombia has a Strategic Plan for Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines 2016–2021, which categorises mined areas according to impact. Operators outside the military, which are by far the largest operator, are typically assigned high-impact areas, which are often inaccessible due to security issues. Operators have found they are locked into scattered tasks by Descontamina without consideration for efficient resource deployment. The Armed Forces receive more tasks than they can manage, resulting in more than 60% of the assigned municipalities without operations on the ground, but still blocked to other organisations.
LAND RELEASE SYSTEM (20% of overall score)	5	Colombia has 15 national mine action standards (NMAS) in place, but no defined land release concept. The technical survey and new quality management NMAS has yet to be implemented effectively and the land release NMAS is still under development. Colombia has a large demining capacity with nine active operators who use an increasing range of demining assets. Efficiency and effectiveness of survey and clearance could still be improved with a quality management system causing unnecessary delays and mined areas that prove to have no contamination still being cleared.
LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE (20% of overall score)	4	It is unclear how much land was released in 2018 due to discrepancies within Colombia's latest Article 7 transparency report. Colombia is not on track to meet its Article 5 deadline and it has already stated that it will request an extension.
Average Score	4.4	Overall Programme Performance: POOR

DEMINEING CAPACITY

MANAGEMENT

- Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (OACP)
– Descontamina Colombia

NATIONAL OPERATORS

- Humanitarian Demining Brigade (Brigada de Desminado Humanitario (BRDEH))
- Marine Corps Explosives and Demining Association (AEDIM)
- Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM)
- Asociación Colombiana de Técnicos y Expertos en Explosivos e Investigadores de Incendios y NBQR (ATEXX) (not operational in 2018)
- Humanicemos DH (not operational in 2018)
- Colombia sin Minas (not operational in 2018)

INTERNATIONAL OPERATORS

- Danish Demining Group (DDG)
- The HALO Trust
- Humanity and Inclusion (HI)
- Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)
- Perigeo
- Polus Colombia

OTHER ACTORS

- Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD)
- United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)
- Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)
- Organization of American States (OAS)

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

The precise extent of anti-personnel mine contamination in Colombia remains highly uncertain, but as at October 2018 at least 28 of Colombia's 32 departments were suspected to have a mine threat.¹ As at July 2019, Colombia still lacked an accurate understanding of total contamination, which according to its strategic plan for 2016–21 was 52km² across 673 municipalities from a total of 1,122.² This estimate is unreliable. It is based on a calculation that takes 15% of the number of IMSMA "events" from 1990 to 2009 and adds them to 24% of the number IMSMA events from 2010 to 2015, with a further 20% added for both periods. These percentages were calculated based on information from historic humanitarian demining operations. The figure it generates is then multiplied by an estimated average confirmed hazardous area (CHA) of 5,000m², which generated the baseline contamination figure for the country.³ Historically, the most affected departments are said to be Antioquia, Meta, Caquetá, Arauca, Norte de Santander, Nariño, Cauca, Bolívar, Tolima, and Putumayo.⁴

In May 2019, Colombia provided a revised estimate that 713 municipalities had anti-personnel mine contamination, of which 350 have been declared free of mines, 163 are assigned, and the remaining 200 are awaiting intervention.⁵ However, this figure was not derived from a more systematic survey approach, and as at August 2019, there were no reported plans to conduct a national baseline of contamination. In 2018, Colombia reported that 166 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) totalling 852,871m² and 199 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) totalling 1,133,303m² were added to the database through non-technical survey.⁶ Of this, The HALO Trust reported adding 527,603m², Humanity and Inclusion (HI) 290,000m², Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) 196,201m², and Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas (CCCM) 69,832m² of previously unrecorded anti-personnel mine contamination.⁷ None of this newly recorded contamination corresponds to new or recent use of anti-personnel mines; security still restricts access to areas where new mines are being laid.⁸

All the landmines remaining in Colombia are said to have been laid by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and are anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature. According to The HALO Trust, mined areas in Colombia are low-density, nuisance minefields that average 4,000m² in size.⁹ Mines were planted in isolated rural areas 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.¹⁰ As there was little, if any, mapping of mined areas by NSAGs and the intended victims were the military or paramilitaries, local communities were often informed that certain areas were mined, though no specifics were given. This has led to a widespread belief that mines are everywhere and local people are afraid to use vast areas of land for fear of mines, despite scant firm evidence of their presence.¹¹

In many areas where the FARC demobilised, the government has yet to arrive in force, with other NSAGs now struggling for power.¹² This includes FARC dissidents, the National Liberation Army (ELN), and drug-trafficking groups, especially the largest among them, the Gaitán Self-Defence Forces. Most of the fight for control is concentrated in about one-quarter of the country's municipalities. Mine action operations will only be undertaken with the local community's agreement, often in areas where mistrust of the state is high and community members are sceptical of the operator's intentions due to the perception that operators are linked to the military. This negatively affects the ability of humanitarian demining organisations to conduct survey and clearance and to determine an accurate estimate of contamination in these areas.¹³

NEW CONTAMINATION

In 2018, the amount of land used for coca leaf production reached an all-time high and it has been reported that new mines are being emplaced to protect these plantations. According to Miguel Ceballos, the High Commissioner for Peace, the government is particularly concerned about the resurgence of this practice in the northern Chocó region, an ELN stronghold.¹⁴ There was a dramatic rise in the number of civilian and military victims due to anti-personnel mines in 2018 to 178 from 57 the year before. As at June 2019, there had already been 72 victims of anti-personnel mines and, according to the High Commissioner, at least half of these are related to coca cultivations.¹⁵ HI estimated that of the 290,000m² of previously unrecorded anti-personnel mine contamination they identified in 2018, about 10% was new contamination mostly found in the department of Cauca.¹⁶

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

In April 2017, following the adoption of a Presidential Decree, the Directorate for Comprehensive Mine Action (Dirección para la Acción Integral contra minas Antipersonal, DAICMA) became Dirección para la Acción Integral contra Minas Antipersonal – Descontamina Colombia. Descontamina Colombia was ostensibly made Colombia's national mine action authority, with responsibility for formulating the strategic direction of mine action, coordinating and monitoring mine action at national and local level, applying technical guidance and regulating state and non-state operators, and elaborating and implementing national standards. In practice, it also serves as the national mine action centre.¹⁷ In February 2019, responsibility for Descontamina Colombia was reallocated to the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace with a new Director, the Deputy Commissioner for Peace, elevating decision-making to the presidential level.¹⁸ As stipulated in the National Development Plan 2018–2022, the President has overall responsibility for public policy on mine action.¹⁹ However, in this process mine action has been disconnected from the Office of the Presidential Counsellor for Stabilization, limiting access to stabilisation and development funds for the sector.²⁰

In 2011, Decree 3750 created the Instancia Interinstitucional de Desminado Humanitario (IIDH – Interinstitutional Tribunal for Humanitarian Demining) which is composed of a representative from the Ministry of National Defense, the General Inspectorate of the Military Forces, and Descontamina Colombia. It is responsible for recommending or suspending the certification of humanitarian demining organisations to the Ministry of National Defence and, determining and assigning demining tasks.²¹ In addition, Decree 3750 called for the elaboration of National Standards for Humanitarian Demining and regulates the quality management of demining operations.²²

Promulgated in July 2017, Decree 1195 outlines mitigation and correction measures that must be applied by operators when demining in National Parks and other areas of ecological

value.²³ Operators are currently expected to reforest in protected areas after clearance to mitigate environmental impact.²⁴

While roles and responsibilities at a national level are generally clear, operators often experience costly delays due to slow approval and lengthy decision-making processes.²⁵ The HALO Trust has reported that the importing process is often complicated which delays the importing of equipment from overseas.²⁶

The Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) has been helping Descontamina Colombia to develop and implement national standards and to improve their information management capacities, albeit with mixed success. In July 2019, following the start of FSD's new contract, an additional information management advisor was hired to support Descontamina with data analysis and evidence-based decision making.²⁷

The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) provides technical assistance to the national authority and provides training and capacity building with a focus on national operators. In 2018–19, UNMAS worked closely with Humanicemos DH to support capacity development with the ultimate aim of it becoming a fully self-sufficient operator.²⁸ Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) provides capacity development support to Descontamina Colombia for information management, operational efficiency including survey, and national standards.

As at August 2019, Colombia had not provided information on how much it contributes to support the cost of the mine action centre and/or demining. It does receive very significant international donor support for mine action and has also secured funding from the Warren Buffet Foundation for demining equipment for the BRDEH. Colombia has estimated it will need \$320 million dollars to complete anti-personnel mine clearance in the country. As at June 2018, it had received almost \$150 million in external funding.²⁹

GENDER

In 2019, Colombia appointed Martha Hurtado as the head of Descontamina Colombia, one of the few female heads of a national mine action authority in the world. In the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, of the 30 officials dedicated to mine action 19 (63%) are women and of these (63%) are in managerial/supervisory positions.³⁰ In 2017, at the request of the previous Director of Descontamina Colombia, GMAP initiated a consultative process to develop a national gender and diversity policy, but due to a change in management the process stalled.³¹

Operators often conduct non-technical survey in communities that were previously inaccessible due to the security situation. All the operators stressed the importance of community liaison and of working with local people, including by employing “local guides” who have either direct or indirect links with the FARC, as a way of both building relationships with the community and as a source of accurate information about the existence of contamination.³² The HALO Trust, HI, NPA, and the CCCM all reported consulting women and children during non-technical survey and community liaison

and employing women in their non-technical survey teams, but this is not done systematically nor is it required by the non-technical survey NMAS although it is a requirement of the mine risk education NMAS.³³

Colombia does have special constitutional protections for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities which are taken into account during planning and prioritisation and stipulate that these communities require a different engagement approach.³⁴

The OAS has 55% of women employed in managerial or supervisory positions.³⁵ However, of the 4,076 accredited personnel in the BRDEH only five are women, one of whom leads a demining battalion.³⁶

The HALO Trust has an organisational gender and diversity policy. Open recruitment for jobs such as deminers specifically encourages women to apply because manual labour is often seen as not appropriate for women in some rural regions of Colombia. Women hold senior positions in the organisation, including deputy programme manager, location

manager, demining and non-technical survey supervisors and team leaders. An average of 17% of operations staff employed in 2018 were women. Of the senior management positions available, approximately 38% are occupied by women.³⁷

As at July 2019, NPA Colombia is in the process of developing a gender and diversity policy and has made gender and diversity the focus of one of its key performance indicators (KPIs). NPA is currently working to redress the gender balance in operations and at the managerial level. Women and people from indigenous communities were targeted during a recent recruitment drive where of 32 new staff, 11 were female (34%), 2 were persons with disabilities (6%), and 4 were from indigenous communities (13%). In 2018, 25% of staff at an operational level (37 of 150) and 41% of managerial staff were female (15 of 37). In 2019, NPA is planning to deploy an all-female demining team to challenge gender bias within Colombian society.³⁸

HI has an organisational disability, gender, and age policy which specifies that HI Colombia will need to elaborate an implementation plan. HI actively recruits women and offers gender-appropriate working conditions, such as separate living quarters in the field. Despite receiving fewer job applications from women, overall female representation in demining teams is at about 30%. In 2018, 14 of 48 survey and clearance personnel were women (29%), 2 of 3 Demining Area Managers were women (66%), 6 of 15 supervisors/team leaders were women (40%), and the Demining Manager was a woman.³⁹

CCCM has a gender and diversity policy and implementation plan. All non-technical survey teams are trained in gender sensitivity and inclusivity and CCCM has made gender and diversity part of its project indicators. In 2018, one fifth of operational roles and half of supervisory/managerial roles were filled by women.⁴⁰

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Poor information management has been a feature of Colombia's mine action programme since its inception. Government Decree 1649 of 2014 assigned Descontamina Colombia responsibility for IMSMA database and to "compile, systematise, centralise, and update relevant information" to serve as a basis for programme planning.⁴¹ Descontamina Colombia uses the IMSMA database and its own Periferico database. While there continue to be issues with information management, the GICHD has noted improvements since 2017 in data sharing and data quality following a significant review and correction of IMSMA data.⁴²

Since 1990, Colombia has collected and reported on "events" related to anti-personnel mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). This data has been the main indicator of contamination and has formed the basis of demining planning and prioritisation.⁴³ In areas where non-technical survey has been carried out, there is a much clearer understanding of contamination. IMSMA "events" are the main source of contamination information in areas that have not yet been surveyed.⁴⁴ As at December 2018, 24,647 of these "events" had been registered in IMSMA across 28 departments.⁴⁵ Operators have reported that these IMSMA events are beset with errors, including duplications and inaccuracies. Despite some improvements to the registration of these events and a clean-up of the database when operators are assigned a task and investigate each event they are still finding that most do not correspond to the presence of either mines or UXO.⁴⁶ For example, HI stated that 76% of areas tasked in 2018 that were reported to contain anti-personnel mines were not linked to recorded IMSMA events.⁴⁷

In March 2018, FSD took over information management support for Descontamina Colombia from NPA. Descontamina Colombia in conjunction with FSD has been training the OAS to use IMSMA and claims that the quality of the database is improving.⁴⁸ Access to data has improved with IMSMA now available online and licences granted to the operators for access to the, separate Descontamina run, Periferico database. Training has also been provided for operators in the management of the online platforms that are required to submit demining outputs. HI has reported that there is a willingness from Descontamina to listen and provide support in solving problems.⁴⁹ Data collection forms for inputting data into Periferico are missing data fields and some information cannot be captured though a number of improvements have been made.⁵⁰ As at July 2019, the new national standard on information management was still under development.⁵¹ In the almost three years since the implementation of the Strategic Plan, Descontamina Colombia has not conducted significant analysis of the newly available data nor have they updated the categorisation of municipalities to prioritise actions on the ground.⁵²

Article 7 reports are submitted on a timely basis but the data is inconsistent and inaccurate. Colombia has stated that the numbers in its Article 7 report for 2018 are provisional, which may account for some of the discrepancies with operators' figures. However, this does not account for the inconsistent land release figures in its Article 7 report, with varying numbers provided for survey and clearance.⁵³ A major issue for Descontamina Colombia in providing timely and accurate land release data is the lengthy approval process which can mean that reports are approved six months after they have been submitted.⁵⁴ Colombia makes regular statements on Article 5 implementation at meetings of states parties but there are inconsistencies in the data reported between statements.⁵⁵

PLANNING AND TASKING

Colombia developed a five-year Strategic Plan for Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines 2016–2021. The aim is to address anti-personnel mine contamination in 673 municipalities, of which 199 are high-impact municipalities (type I), 291 medium-impact municipalities (type II), and the remaining 183 low-impact municipalities (type III), covering a total estimated area of 51km².⁵⁴ Type I comprise incidents involving casualties from anti-personnel mines or UXO registered on IMSMA since 2010; type II are incidents involving anti-personnel mines and UXO and relate to casualties registered on IMSMA before 2010; and type III are IMSMA “events” without human impact.⁵⁷

In May 2019, Colombia revised the estimated number of municipalities to 713 and reported that the suspicion of mines had been removed in 350 municipalities, though this was only achieved through actual survey or clearance in 174 of these and the majority of these areas have had very low, or even no contamination at all. Descontamina has assigned 163 municipalities to operators for demining operations although access to the most contaminated areas is constrained due to the prevailing security situation. In addition, 200 municipalities suspected to be contaminated with anti-personnel mines have seen no survey or clearance yet.⁵⁸

It is expected that a new strategic plan, directed by the new government and the development of which is being facilitated by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), will be elaborated by the end of 2019. In March 2019, a participatory review of the mine action sector began. Operators and other sector stakeholders such as UNMAS and FSD were asked to help redesign the mine action strategy through workshops, but these ceased in June 2019 along with any feedback or progress updates from Descontamina.⁵⁹ As at August 2019, there was no indication that the participatory reviews would continue, raising concerns that the new strategy will not respond to the operational reality on the ground or humanitarian and local community needs.⁶⁰ Additionally, some operators reported concerns that the framework for the strategy lacks specific detail in addressing some key issues, such as prioritisation, technical survey, insecurity, and lack of capacity at the national authority.⁶¹ Descontamina Colombia has also stated that it will work with the local authorities on the inclusion of demining in local development plans.⁶²

Descontamina Colombia had an action plan for 2018, but it did not include any specific targets for land release.⁶³ In its Article 7 transparency report for 2017, Colombia projected that it would release 1,445,971m² of anti-personnel mine, UXO and other IED contamination in 2018.⁶⁴ The reported total for 2018 of 1,535,213m² exceeded the target by 89,242m², but it is likely that the reported land release figure for 2018 is inaccurate. Colombia has projected that it would release 80 municipalities with a total area of 1,616,802m² in 2019.⁶⁵

Colombia prioritises its task allocation according to the IIDH and the Strategic Plan for Comprehensive Action against Antipersonnel Mines 2016–2021. The IIDH takes into account information provided by local bodies, the Early Warning System of the Ombudsman's Office, and the General Command of the Military Forces, and Descontamina Colombia.⁶⁶ The Strategic Plan has categorised municipalities in Type (Priority) I, II, and III, which are then proposed for

task allocation to the demining organisations without a given order, hindering a systemic approach to the demining of the territory. Civilian organisations can generally only bid for tasks in assigned type I areas while the armed forces have been assigned more of the type II and III areas, many of which they have been able to cancel and release through discussion with the local community and local security councils.⁶⁷ Type I areas tend to have the highest levels of anti-personnel mine contamination and the most security issues. In these areas contaminated territories are often inaccessible to operators or operators are forced to suspend survey and clearance operations due to security concerns. These suspensions can last anywhere from a few days to indefinitely depending on the situation severely disrupting operations.⁶⁸ For example, as at July 2019, of the ten Type I municipalities currently assigned to NPA, nine were inaccessible due to insecurity.⁶⁹ The impact of this differential approach to task assignment is that it is difficult to directly compare the output and levels of operational efficiency between operators.

Descontamina Colombia's ability to coordinate has come under scrutiny, 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. In the view of UNMAS, in Descontamina Colombia's push to assign tasks demonstrating the peace accord's new opportunities, operators are often deployed into new areas disconnected from their existing areas of operation and without prior consideration of their capacity. This is not an efficient use of resources.⁷⁰ While an operator can lose an assigned municipality through inactivity, the bar for what constitutes an activity is so low that in reality no municipalities are reassigned. This had led to some operators running out of task sites while other tasks remain dormant.⁷¹ Under Article 6(8) of the APMBC, states parties receiving international assistance are obligated to cooperate with a view to ensuring the full and prompt implementation of agreed assistance programmes.

Within municipalities, operators prioritise tasks in agreement with municipal authorities, local leaders and the national mine action authority.⁷² There are no specific criteria for task prioritisation within municipalities and operators are at liberty to follow their own priorities.⁷³

In May 2019, Descontamina Colombia reported working with the Armed Forces on a new model of prioritisation. This model will integrate IMSMA data with more than 40 indicators that take into account security conditions, public policy, and bids from demining operators.⁷⁴ However, there was no consultation with operators on this new model nor has this model been discussed in the strategic review workshops as was previously agreed.⁷⁵

If an anti-personnel mine is found in an area that has been “declared free of the suspicion of mines” it is expected that the community will inform the national authority or demining operator. This reporting mechanism is communicated during non-technical survey and community liaison activities as stipulated in the non-technical survey and clearance NMAS. If the national authority is informed of any residual contamination then either the operator or the BRDEH will be tasked with carrying out the necessary survey and clearance.⁷⁶

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Colombia now has 15 national mine action standards (NMAS) in place, including a glossary of mine action terms, up from just three when the 2016–21 strategic plan was launched.⁷⁷ In 2018–19, discussions took place on the land release and medical support NMAS and adjustments were made to the non-technical survey, manual demining, and mine detection dog (MDD) NMAS.⁷⁸ A new system of confidence levels has been introduced into the revised quality management standard. Each operator will be assigned a confidence level and an operator with good confidence levels will be subject to less frequent visits from OAS, allowing them to focus on operators that need more support.⁷⁹ As at July 2019, a pilot phase for this new system was in development.⁸⁰

The non-technical survey NMAS was amended to allow operators to investigate IMSMA events that fall outside their assigned area.⁸¹ The NMAS on technical survey was approved by Descontamina Colombia in December 2017 but is not yet implemented by all operators, as according to the standard if any contamination is found during survey full clearance must be carried out, negating the efficiencies of technical survey.⁸² A revised technical survey NMAS was expected to be approved by the end of 2019.⁸³

OPERATORS

There are 12 operators accredited for demining in Colombia. The largest clearance operator is the Armed Forces Humanitarian Demining Brigade (Brigada de Desminado Humanitario (BRDEH). The Marine Corps Explosives and Demining Association (AEDIM), a smaller military operator, conducts clearance and destruction of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in areas under the jurisdiction of the National Navy.⁸⁴ Demining is also conducted by international mine action NGOs. The HALO Trust, NPA and HI are the largest of these operators, while Danish Demining Group (DDG), Perigeo, and Polus Colombia also conduct limited survey and clearance. National NGO the CCCM was also active in 2018. Humanicemos DH, the demining organisation comprised of ex-fighters from the FARC-EP, was accredited in August 2017.⁸⁵ As at July 2019, however, it was still not operational due to the OAS's inability to certify former fighters being reintegrated under the 2016 peace accord (see below).⁸⁶ Another national NGO, Colombia sin Minas, has also been accredited but is not yet operational.⁸⁷ As at September 2019, the military had been assigned 57% of the total number of areas tasked for demining.⁸⁸

BRDEH has been conducting humanitarian demining in Colombia since 2005.⁸⁴ In 2017, there were seven demining battalions operational across the country composed of between one and sixty deminers each.⁸⁵ In 2018, a total of 4,076 personnel had been accredited to conduct demining operations in the BRDEH along with two mechanical assets and 15 MDDs.⁸⁶ AEDIM has been operational since 2014. In 2018, a total of 206 personnel had been accredited to conduct demining operations.⁸⁷

In 2013, The HALO Trust became the first NGO to conduct demining in Colombia.⁷⁸ In 2018, The HALO Trust deployed 102 non-technical survey personnel and 235 clearance personnel.

Colombia does not yet have a land release NMAS that has been approved and implemented by Descontamina Colombia. This is due mostly to the lack of experience and exposure of the national authority to the concept, despite ongoing technical support to the authority from FSD.⁸⁴ As a result there is an over-reliance on full clearance. The national standard does not allow cancellation of an area being cleared before at least 50% of the clearance is completed, even if all indications are that no explosive items will be found.⁸⁵

From Descontamina Colombia's 2018 figures, of 193 mined areas cleared, in as many as 95 (49%), no explosive device was found. While still extremely high, this is actually an improvement on 2017 when no explosive devices were found in 65% of areas cleared.⁸⁶ In the figures reported by operators for the CCCM, 44% (eight of eighteen) of areas cleared did not contain any anti-personnel mines; for HI it was 21% (three of fourteen), for NPA it was 26% (seven of twenty-seven).⁸⁷ In July 2019, work on the land release NMAS was halted until key staff at Descontamina had been replaced, due to occur by the end of August 2019.⁸⁸

There was a slight increase in clearance capacity from 2017 and a much larger 35% increase in non-technical survey capacity due to non-technical survey-only contracts funded by international and local donors. The HALO Trust reduced non-technical survey capacity in 2019 due to a lack of newly assigned areas but clearance capacity was expected to remain the same.⁸⁹

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. In 2018, NPA deployed 18 non-technical survey personnel, three community liaison/non-technical survey officers and 146 clearance personnel including 65 deminers. There was an increase in capacity from 2017 and NPA hoped to expand staffing in 2019.¹⁰⁰

HI began humanitarian demining in Colombia in 2017. In 2018, HI deployed 10 non-technical survey personnel and 38 clearance personnel, broadly the same capacity as in 2017. In 2019, HI planned to decrease the number of clearance personnel in favour of non-technical survey and Multi-Task Teams.¹⁰¹

The CCCM began humanitarian demining work in Colombia in 2017. UNMAS have supported the CCCM to go from an advocacy organisation to a demining operator, assisting in the development and review of operational plans and providing initial funding to the CCCM for this transition.¹⁰² In 2018, the CCCM deployed 60 non-technical survey personnel across 15 teams and 36 clearance personnel across six teams. The CCCM increased non-technical survey capacity by 115% from 2017 and hoped to increase capacity by another 60% in 2019. Clearance capacity also rose by 20% from 2017 to 2018; CCCM were hoping for a further 32% increase in 2019.¹⁰³

DDG has been active in Colombia since 2011 and received Phase 1 accreditation to conduct demining in 2017.¹⁰⁴ In April 2018, DDG began non-technical survey operations with one team in the department of Caquetá. As at April 2019, DDG was conducting non-technical survey in two municipalities in Caquetá.¹⁰⁵

Humanicemos DH are still not operational despite having 124 former fighters trained in survey and clearance as the United States (US) still recognises the FARC as a terrorist organisation so former fighters cannot be associated with any US-funded projects which means that the OAS is unable to QA/QC such deminers.¹⁰⁶ The Government of Colombia has therefore decided to mandate UNMAS to assume this role, though the formal mandate to do so was still unsigned as at September 2019. This has led to delays in Humanicemos DH being able to start clearance operations with personnel sitting idle while they wait for their accreditation.¹⁰⁷

The OAS serves as the body for accreditation and monitoring of humanitarian demining in Colombia. It has been criticised for being too focused on compliance rather than on supporting the operators to run effective demining operations. This has manifested itself in non-critical conformities being determined by rigid application and varied interpretation of national standards and/or SoPs, leading

to delays in operations.¹⁰⁸ At the request of Descontamina Colombia, FSD has been seeking to build capacity in the OAS, including by refocusing monitoring on QA and QC, rather than on minor administrative non-conformities.¹⁰⁹ It is hoped that revising the quality management NMAS and introducing confidence levels will improve these processes. However, the OAS has been without a director since May 2019, reducing the possibility of capacity building.¹¹⁰

There have also been long waiting times after paperwork has been submitted, which has delayed operations. The HALO Trust reported that once a non-technical survey report has been submitted to the OAS, there can be a significant delay before the report gets approved.¹¹¹ NPA 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.¹¹²

Each operator carries out their own internal QC in accordance with the provisions in the Quality Management NMAS and their organisational SoPs. From June 2016 to June 2018, Descontamina Colombia had a team of Quality Managers providing technical assistance to operators on issues such as accreditation of personnel and demining techniques, interpretation of and compliance with national standards, and conflicts between the OAS and the operators.¹¹³

OPERATIONAL TOOLS

According to the national standards MDDs can be used in Colombia to conduct technical survey and clearance while mechanical assets can be used for ground preparation.¹¹⁴

NPA uses a toolbox comprising manual deminers, MDDs, and machines. In 2019, these assets were rebalanced to achieve optimal output, which was found to be a ratio of, three manual teams, three MDD teams, and two mechanical teams. Mechanical teams undertake ground preparation.¹¹⁵ In 2018, NPA had two incidents where mines were found after clearance had been conducted by MDD teams. After thorough investigation it was concluded that it was the way MDDs were used and not the effectiveness of the assets as such that

were the problem. NPA developed detailed plans to correct the problems identified and is confident that MDDs are an effective asset for Colombia when used correctly.¹¹⁶

In 2018, The HALO Trust conducted only manual clearance but carried out field trials of both a newly acquired mechanical asset for vegetation clearance and four MDDs.¹¹⁷ The CCCM conducts clearance using manual techniques only, though it planned to introduce MDDs into its operations in 2019.¹¹⁸ HI conducts clearance using only manual demining but was hoping to start machine-assisted clearance in the course of 2019.¹¹⁹

DEMINER SAFETY

In April 2018, FARC dissidents in La Reforma, San Martin municipality in the department of Meta seized a CCCM vehicle and held it for just over a month before returning it to the CCCM. When non-technical survey had been conducted in the area, the FARC dissidents had felt ignored, but after consultation the CCCM were allowed to conduct operations.¹²⁰ In the same month, BRDEH had a vehicle set alight in the Suarez municipality in Cauca. In addition, in 2018, BRDEH had to suspend operations in Aguazul, Casanare, and Quibdó, Chocó due to ELN presence and lack of community support, respectively.¹²¹

In July 2018, The HALO Trust had a vehicle seized and set on fire in the village of Santander, Uribe municipality, in Meta. An armed group of 15 FARC dissidents detained a team of four conducting non-technical survey, forcing them to leave the vehicle before setting it on fire. The group threatened the non-technical survey team and informed them that they did not want The HALO Trust operating in the Uribe or Mesetas municipalities.¹²²

In February 2019, NPA staff were threatened and had a vehicle set alight in Puerto Lleras, Meta and were informed that they should leave the area. The area where the incident happened was close to coca production and distribution routes.¹²³

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2018

In 2018, Colombia released¹²⁴ a total of almost 1.54km², of which 0.05km² was cancelled through non-technical survey, 0.52km² reduced through technical survey and 0.96km² was cleared. A total of 322 anti-personnel mines and 104 items of UXO were found and destroyed.

Colombia also stated in its annual Article 7 report that 559,773m² was "released" through data clean-up in 2018.¹²⁵ This occurs in low-impact areas after discussions between the armed forces and the local security councils.¹²⁶

In addition, Colombia reported that 166 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) totalling 852,871m² and 199 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) totalling 1,133,303m² were added to the database through non-technical survey.¹²⁷ As Colombia continues to operate without a land release NMAS, technically land is not "released" but declared free of the suspicion of mines and subsequently handed back to the communities.

SURVEY IN 2018

In 2018, a total of 48,405m² was cancelled through non-technical survey (see Table 1),¹²⁸ a massive 80% reduction from the 239,068m² cancelled in 2017. Operators' figures differ significantly from those reported by Descontamina.¹²⁹ In part, this misreporting may be due to Colombia's national standards which specify that land can also be cancelled through technical survey and clearance.¹³⁰

A total of 524,936m² was reported as reduced by technical survey in 2018 (see Table 2), double the output from the 346,301m² reduced in the previous year. Neither Handicap International nor The HALO reported reducing any mined areas through technical survey, as in 2018 it had not been properly implemented.¹³¹ This would suggest that Colombia is misreporting its survey results.

Table 1: Cancellation of mined area through non-technical survey in 2018¹³²

Department	Operator	Area cancelled (m ²)
Antioquia	BRDEH	373
Antioquia	HALO Trust	6,196
Bolivar	The National Army	6,032
Cauca	HI	1,600
Meta	NPA	26,996
Meta	HI	6,848
Total		48,045

Table 2: Reduction of mined area through technical survey in 2018¹³³

Province	Operator	Area reduced (m ²)
Antioquia	BRDEH	167,385
Caldas	BRDEH	15,221
Caquetá	BRDEH	107,913
Huila	BRDEH	13,299
Meta	BRDEH	12,527
Meta	HI	1,298
Nariño	BRDEH	12,340
Putumayo	BRDEH	57,235
Santander	BRDEH	7,151
Sucre	National Army	1,077
Tolima	BRDEH	66,874
Tolima	HALO Trust	9,822
Valle del Cauca	BRDEH	52,794
Total		524,936

CLEARANCE IN 2018

In 2018, a total of 962,232m² was cleared across 193 mined areas (see Table 3), a 150% increase on the 383,951m² cleared in 2017. Operators figures were again different from those reported by Descontamina.¹³⁴ The increased clearance output from the previous year is due to increase in operator capacity, improvements in operational efficiency, and more targeted deployment of clearance resources.¹³⁵

Table 3: Mine clearance in 2018¹³⁶

Department	Operators	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
Antioquia	BRDEH	19	91,934	39	1
Antioquia	HALO Trust	32	112,206	72	1
Bolivar	National Army	7	55,657	0	1
Caldas	BRDEH	9	39,107	18	0
Caquetá	BRDEH	18	101,997	35	1
Caquetá	HI	2	2,410	1	0
Cauca	HI	3	4,228	0	0
Cauca	HALO Trust	1	490	3	0
Huila	BRDEH	4	15,377	8	1
Huila	CCCM	7	12,861	2	1
Meta	BRDEH	5	69,528	6	0
Meta	CCCM	9	18,415	2	1
Meta	HI	5	26,207	13	0
Meta	HALO Trust	11	99,389	11	2
Nariño	BRDEH	3	18,000	7	1
Putumayo	BRDEH	3	8,535	3	5
Putumayo	CCCM	3	3,845	5	0
Santander	BRDEH	2	712	25	0
Sucre	National Army	3	11,691	1	0
Tolima	BRDEH	20	120,827	62	88
Tolima	HALO Trust	15	81,983	4	1
Valle del Cauca	BRDEH	10	54,564	3	0
Valle del Cauca	HALO Trust	2	12,269	2	0
Totals		193	962,232	322	104

AP = Anti-personnel UXO = Unexploded Ordnance IED = Improvised explosive device

ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE AND COMPLIANCE

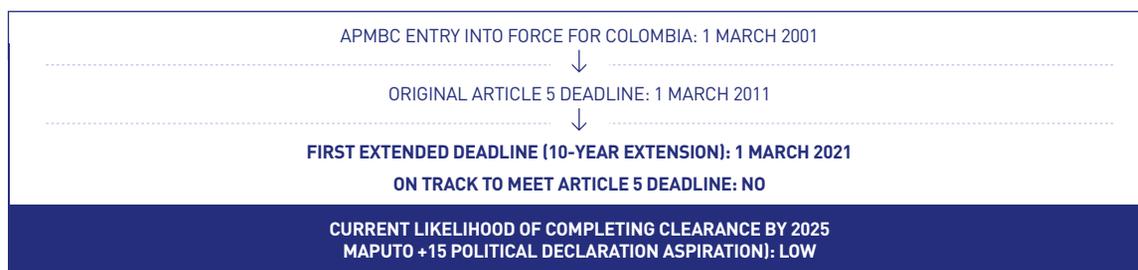


Table 4: Five-year summary of AP mine clearance (2014–18)

Year	Area cleared (m ²)
2018	962,232
2017	380,000
2016	290,000
2015	360,000
2014	540,000
Total	2,532,232

In May 2019, Colombia stated it was planning to request a further extension to its Article 5 deadline as Colombia would not complete clearance by 2021.¹³⁷ It is expected that Colombia will request a new deadline to 2025 but it is unclear whether Colombia will even be able to meet this new date. In order to do so there are numerous challenges that Colombia will have to overcome, some of which are outside of the control of the mine action programme and some which are of its own making.

It is very difficult to conduct an accurate assessment of Colombia's progress to date as it continues to be without a reliable estimate of outstanding anti-personnel mine contamination through evidence-based survey. Its estimate of anti-personnel mine contamination of 52km² across 673 municipalities is based on IMSMA data that operators have found to be consistently unreliable. In May 2019, this was revised to 713 municipalities, of which 350 had been declared free of the suspicion of mines, though in only 174 of these was this achieved through actual survey or clearance.

In 2018, Colombia reported "release" of 1.54km² of mined area, though this figure is likely to be inaccurate. Colombia has projected an increase in land release for 2019, but the areas declared free of mines so far have had very low or even no contamination. Most high-impact areas are inaccessible due to the difficult security situation. The ongoing issues with security, with the rise of FARC dissidents, the ELN, and drug trafficking, means it is unlikely humanitarian demining organisations will be able to access these areas any time soon. Focus for demining operations should remain on the high impact areas that can be accessed while ensuring that these operations are effectively and efficiently planned.

Non-technical and technical survey is vital to efficient demining operations and are particularly important in Colombia when the initial information given at the task allocation stage has been found to be so unreliable. As at August 2019, the NMAS for land release was under discussion and the technical survey and new quality management NMAS had still to be implemented effectively. It is vital that operators are facilitated by Descontamina Colombia and the OAS to use the full toolbox of land release methodologies to ensure effective and efficient demining operations.

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- 49 Email from Arturo Bureo, HI, 18 July 2019.
- 50 Ibid.; and email from Arturo Bureo, HI, 18 July 2019.
- 51 Email from Arturo Bureo, HI, 18 July 2019.
- 52 Email from Jan Philip Klever, UNMAS, 12 September 2019.
- 53 In 2018, Colombia reported different land release figures in its Article 7 report in its land release figures in the table disaggregated by department and municipality, from the totals provided above the table. According to the figures in the table, Colombia released a total of almost 1.44km², of which 0.03km² was cancelled through non-technical survey, 0.52km² was reduced through technical survey, and almost 0.89m² was cleared. In comparison, the totals provided in the report indicate the Colombia released a total of 1,353,902m² in 2018, of which 31,953m² was cancelled through non-technical survey, 478,342m² was reduced through technical survey, and 843,625m² was cleared. A total of 251 anti-personnel mines, 149 items of UXO, and 123 IEDs were reportedly found and destroyed. Article 7 Report (for 2018), Form C, pp. 15–23.
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