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ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES IN COLOMBIA

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Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL - Observatories on Human Rights and IHL and on Anti-personnel Mines

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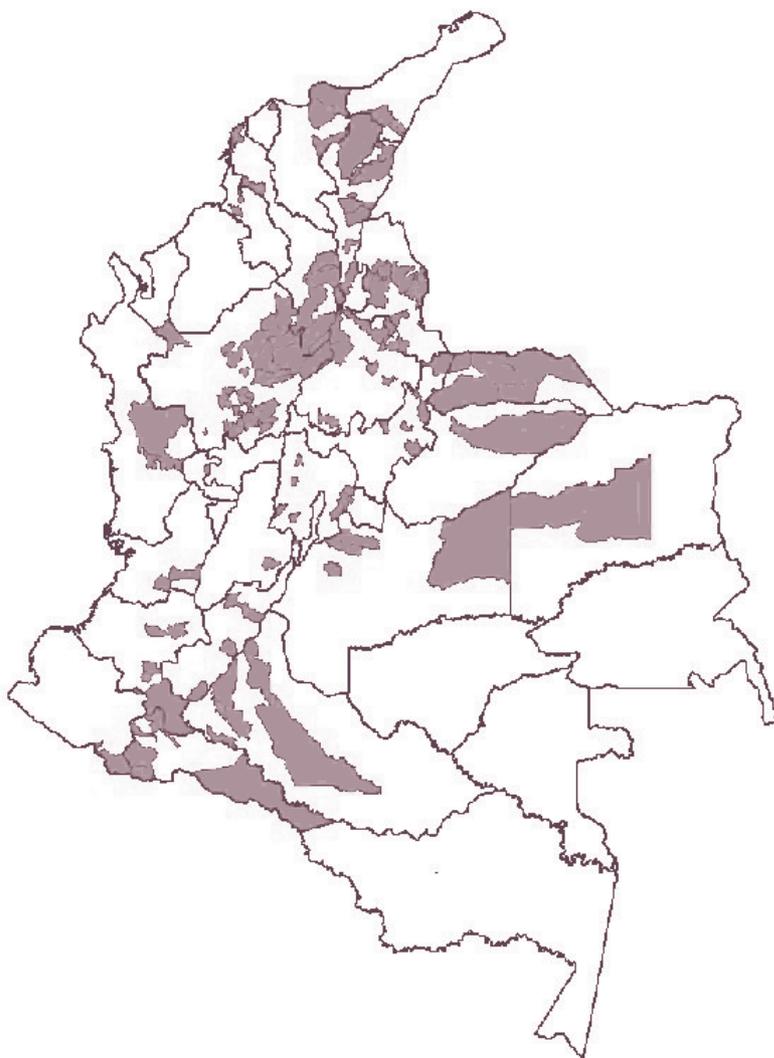
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COLOMBIA KNOWN MINE AREAS MINES, 2001*



Antioquia: Abejorral, Amalfí, Anorí, Barbosa, Bello, Briceño, Carolina, Cocorná, Concepción, El Bagre, El Carmen de Viboral, Granada, Hispania, La Unión, Medellín, Montebello, Mutatá, Peñol, Remedios, Rionegro, San Carlos, San Francisco, San Luis, San Pedro, San Vicente, Santa Bárbara, Segovia, Vegachí, Yalí, Yarumal, Yolombó, Yondó, Zaragoza.

Arauca: Arauca, Arauquita, Puerto Rondon, Saravena, Tame.
Atlántico: Distrito Especial, Industrial y Portuario de Barranquilla.
Bolívar: Cartagena, Morales, Río Viejo, San Pablo, Santa Rosa, Santa Rosa del Sur, Arenal, Cantagallo, El Carmen de Bolívar.
Boyacá: Tasco, Cubará, Chita, Labranzagrande, San Mateo, Duitama.

Caquetá: Florencia, Puerto Rico, Milán, Solita, Cartagena del Chairá, Morelia.
Casanare: Paz de Ariporo.
Cauca: Santa Rosa, Cajibío, Silvia, La Vega, Almaguer.
Cesar: Valledupar, La Paz, Pelaya, Aguachica, Agustín Codazzi, Curumaní, Chiriguana.
Chocó: San Francisco de Quibdó, Tadó, El Cantón de San Pablo.
Cundinamarca: Venecia, Villeta, Viotá, Fómeque, Gama, Guataquí, Jerusalén, La Palma, Gachetá, Junín.
Guajira: El Molino.
Huila: Gigante, Acevedo, Neiva, San Juan del Cesar.
Magdalena: Santa Marta, Ciénaga, Fundación.
Meta: Villavicencio, Acacías, El Castillo, El Dorado, Puerto Gaitán.
Nariño: Ipiales, San Pablo.
Norte de Santander: Cúcuta, El Zulia, Hacarí, Herrán, La Playa, Ocaña, San Calixto, Arboledas, Silos, Sardinata, Ábrego.
Putumayo: Orito, Puerto Leguizamo, Valle del Gaumez, San Miguel, Santiago, Mocoa.
Risaralda: Belén de Umbria.
Santander: Bucaramanga, Capitanejo, Curiti, Albania, Matanza, Puerto Wilches, Rionegro, Barrancabermeja, Sucre, Suratá, Tona, Zapatoca.
Sucre: Sincelejo, Coloso.
Tolima: Prado.
Valle: Cali, Palmira.
Vichada: Cumaribo.

* Up to October 31, 2001

Sources: National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Map: DANE

INTRODUCTION: A HIDDEN THREAT

Few conventional weapons among those used in modern conflicts are as terrifying as anti-personnel mines or mines intended against military personnel. Employed by both regular and irregular combatants since the Second World War as a strategic device to hinder or prevent the advance of the enemy, intimidating or disorganizing it, landmines become weapons of indiscriminate effects since they kill or maim men, women, children or animals, not just during the conflict but for many decades after the end of the hostilities.

An anti-personnel mine is a small device, typically containing not more than half a kilogram of explosives. It is one of the most inexpensive war artifacts. Producing and laying one of them may cost under US\$ 30, and many are as cheap as US\$ 3. Easy to manufacture and transport, anti-personnel mines are accessible to all kinds of illegal armed groups, including common criminals.

Estimates of the number of anti-personnel mines laid throughout the world vary considerably. The most optimistic put the figure at 65 million, and the most pessimistic at 120 million mines, scattered in over 70 countries. In other words, there appears to be one mine for every 52 persons, or for every 17 children. It is believed that two million more mines are placed each year. One hundred and ten million are stockpiled worldwide.



Mines are mostly scattered in rural areas, but also in urban areas, in streets and public buildings, in footpaths and roads, close to military camps or installations, whether permanent or temporary, and in the surroundings of energy or telecommunications facilities. Rarely do combatants, particularly the irregular ones, take care to put the exact location of the mines they have planted on a map. However, even if everyone did it, mines can shift due to floods, landslides, earthquakes, and other causes.

Landmines are a long-term danger. It is unknown how long a mine can survive, but it may be decades, or perhaps centuries. In Poland, during the thirty years after the end of the Second World War, 4,000 people were killed and 9,000 injured by mines left over from the war. This happened despite the removal of 15 million mines in that country, at a great expense. It is believed that, if no more mines were laid, at the current demining rate it would take 1,100 years to rid the world of this terrible threat.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, the source of most of the data relating to countries other than Colombia quoted here, estimates that about 2,000 people suffer landmine accidents every month, that is, one every 20 minutes. Close to 800 of them will die, and the rest will be maimed. The vast majority of the victims are men, soldiers in many cases, although in some countries the proportion of civilians may reach 30 per cent. In certain circumstances the largest number of persons dead or injured are children because of their occupations, their playfulness or their mobility. When the displaced population of a certain region in northern Somalia attempted to return home in 1991, children suffered 75 per cent of landmine accidents. It is believed that 85 per cent of children who have these accidents throughout the world die before they reach hospital.

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COLOMBIAN HUMAN RIGHTS OBSERVATORY

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The social and economic cost of anti-personnel mines are incalculable. In Libya, more than a quarter of the arable land is unusable due to the mines laid during the Second World War. Because of mines, agricultural production in Afghanistan and Cambodia is half what it could be.

Quite apart from the figures and estimates, which may change overnight as researchers make progress, the worst about anti-personnel mines is the suffering inflicted on those unfortunate enough to step on one of them. The physical pain is difficult to describe, and it usually has to be endured for life. The injuries caused by mines are among the most horrendous described by doctors. Mention is frequently made of Ken Rutherford's story. One of the founders of Landmine Survivors Network, he testified before the United Nations Review Conference on Landmines in Vienna in 1995. He was in Somalia in 1993 working on a development project. One day he was travelling to a certain place near the border with Ethiopia, and his car went over a landmine. "After the explosion", he said, "I first remember seeing a foot lying on the floorboard of the car. I remember asking myself: '¿Is it mine?' It was mine, my right foot. I remember that I tried to put it back on several times, but it kept falling off. Then I looked at my left foot. The top part was ripped off and I could see bones going to my toe, one of which was missing". Rutherford, despite everything, was a lucky victim. An American national, he had a radio and was able to call for help and was evacuated by plane. Most people who go through this experience do not have these facilities.

All this could sound foreign and distant to an average Colombian. He or she may think that these things are really associated with Somalia, Afghanistan, Angola, Croatia or other countries that have suffered terrible wars in the recent past, but not with Colombia. The truth, however, is that anti-

personnel mines are a reality in our internal armed conflict. A reality to which we are just awakening.

This document offers a general perspective on anti-personnel mines in Colombia based on data that are verifiable, although obviously incomplete due to the nature of the problem, the dissimilarities between the sources and the difficulties that official researchers find in obtaining reliable information. Nevertheless, the data available makes a starting point for the government to implement research, information and protection programs, and programs for the care of the victims. In particular, a general perspective on anti-personnel mines in Colombia based on the present state of our knowledge, should warn all the parties to the conflict about the seriousness of a problem that is continuously growing, and create awareness among common citizens of a hidden threat that will continue to exist long after the present government's peace efforts bear fruit.

Colombia is a party to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction*, or Ottawa Convention. This means that this Convention is part of internal law. International humanitarian law expressly prohibits all parties to any conflict from using weapons of indiscriminate effects, or that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering. Anti-personnel mines are typical examples of such weapons. The application of the Ottawa Convention and the design and implementation of particular measures to promote international humanitarian law are part of the present government's Policy on Human Rights and the Application of International Humanitarian Law¹. Therefore, legislation

¹ See Office of the Vice President of Colombia, Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, *Progress Report*, March 2001, and August 2001.

Mines: Basic facts

- An anti-personnel mine is a cruel weapon; it is intended to kill or injure people.
- It is activated by the victim, usually innocent, defenseless civilians, particularly peasants or children.
- It has an indiscriminate effect; it makes no distinction between civilians and parties to the conflict.
- Anti-personnel mines are unforgiving explosive devices; they always kill or mutilate.
- In addition to ripping off the victims' arms or legs, anti-personnel mines usually cause blindness and/or deafness, and pierce the body with objects that cause infections.
- A survivor requires more than one operation and a lengthy medical treatment.
- It can take a victim between 6 and 24 hours to reach hospital. Frequently the victim dies before receiving adequate medical care.
- The human cost far exceeds the limited military value of the use of anti-personnel mines.
- Mines restrict economic development and reconstruction. The existence or the suspected existence of anti-personnel mines can make large areas of the country unusable.
- Mines inhibit the return of displaced people, and cause enforced displacement.
- Mines have serious consequences for many years after being laid. They have a long-term effect.
- The removal of mines is a lengthy, dangerous and costly process.

and a policy on anti-personnel mines do exist, as do government programs for prevention and care of the victims. To spread them is part of the fight against this scourge of the modern world.

A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE ON ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES IN COLOMBIA

How many anti-personnel mines are scattered in Colombia is a question that is virtually impossible to answer accurately. A preliminary estimate puts the figure of mines in mined areas at 70,000, of which 20,000 would have been laid by the Military Forces, and the rest by illegal armed groups, particularly the ELN and the FARC². However, taking into account that these devices may have possibly been used in Colombia since the beginning of *La Violencia* (1940s); that there is evidence that most subversive groups have employed them since then; and that currently existent illegal groups use them frequently as an strategic weapon, perhaps without recording their number or mapping their location, the 70,000 figure, with an annual rate of increase of 20 per cent, is at best hypothetical. Nevertheless, it is based on a model that takes account of the size of mined areas and the number of mines in countries affected by this problem, such as Honduras and Nicaragua.

According to National Planning Department figures, the Military Industries (INDUMIL) manufactured 22,300 NM-MAP-1 anti-personnel mines between 1989 and 1996. In 1974, 6,030 M14 mines were imported from the United States. Another 6,012 M18A1 Claymore mines were imported between 1989 and 1991. An additional number of mines were imported from Belgium³. Mines were laid for strategic and defensive purposes, including the protection of military installations, power plants and telecommunications facilities. The Office for International Affairs of the Ministry of Defense informs that INDUMIL destroyed all its equipment for the production of mines in 1999, and also 2,542 mines stockpiled at the José María Córdoba factory. In this way, articles 1 and 4 of the Ottawa Convention started to be complied with. Furthermore, the Military Forces cleared 52



minefields, monitored 52 more, and confiscated a number of devices in 93 operations during the first ten months of 2001.

The National Army has identified a variety of anti-personnel mines used by subversive groups, among them the so-called *leg-breaker mine*, buried in the ground for the protection of camps, the *Chinese hat mine*, used in ambushes, with a range of 25 meters, the *box-type mine*, made up of a wooden box with an angle-shaped metal plate for the accumulation of gases and for the shrapnel, the *Fan-type mine*, furnished with a cone for the accumulation of gases and for the shrapnel, with an effective range of 10 meters, the *cumbo mine*, hung in tree branches at a height of 50 centimeters, the *Cleymore-type mine*, placed by the side of a road or a wooden area, and the *sisal sack mine*, launched against the troops from a high position⁴. All of these mines are handcrafted and use home-made explosives, including a compound of ammonium nitrate (80%), finely ground sawdust (15%), and powdered aluminum (5%). With these simple elements, easy to obtain, and shrapnel composed of nuts, bolts, nails, staples and small pieces of metal, the guerrilla groups inflict casualties on military personnel, and at the same time, considerable, unnecessary suffering.

The Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines, attached to the Presidential Program for the Promotion, Respect and Guarantee of Human Rights and the Application of International Humanitarian Law, has developed a number of indicators of the magnitude and characteristics of the problem of anti-personnel mines in Colombia. It is based on a daily compilation of press items and on military operations associated with accidents or incidents involving anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind, particularly gas cylinders,

² Andrés Celis, "Las minas anti-personal. Posibilidades en medio del conflicto", 1999. Colombian Human Rights Observation Newsletter No. 7, March 2000.

³ National Planning Department, Justice and Security Board, Government and Internal Affairs Group, "La erradicación de las minas anti-personal sembradas en Colombia -Implicaciones y costos-". Executive summary, Bogotá, November 2001.

⁴ Military Forces of Colombia, National Army, School of Military Engineers.

EXAMPLES OF MINES USED BY THE ILLEGAL ARMED GROUPS IN COLOMBIA



Chinese hat mine

A high-explosive device filled with shrapnel, it is used in ambushes on moving personnel. It is placed in slopes at a height of 80 centimeters.



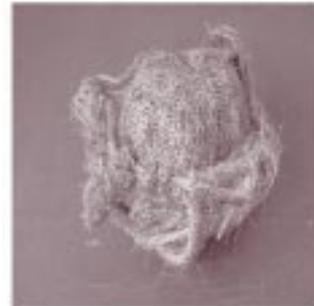
Cumbo mine

Used in wooded areas, it is hung in tree branches at a height of 50 centimeters. The shrapnel it contains spreads in all directions when the mine explodes.



Anti-vehicle mine

Used to destroy or immobilize troop transport vehicles. Placed on roads, it is equipped with an accumulation cone which is directed towards the path of the vehicle.



Sisal sack mine

Used in ambushes on moving troops. Activated through an inelectric system, it is launched against the troops from a high position.

Photographs and details: National Army

and grenades⁵. According to data gathered by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel mines, during the first ten months of 2001 there were 243 accidents or incidents of this kind in Colombia. Eighty seven per cent of them, that is, 211, were anti-personnel mine accidents. Worst hit was the department of Antioquia, where 56 cases were recorded, followed by Arauca (28), Santander (26), Bolivar (20), and Norte de Santander (18). Out of the total number of accidents or incidents relating to anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind, 62 were accidents, that is, they left victims, while 181 were incidents, including the finding of a minefield or a

suspected minefield, the removal of mines by the Military Forces, and the confiscation or deactivation of explosive devices.

Responsibility for accidents or incidents involving anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind in Colombia has not been determined in 42 per cent of cases. Responsibility for 57 per cent of all cases is attributed to the illegal armed groups. The FARC are held responsible for 30 per cent of all accidents or incidents (73), the ELN for 25.9 per cent (63), and the self-defense groups for 1.6 per cent (4). At least three accidents or incidents were associated with FARC and ELN joint operations. One case in the department of Sucre is attributed to the People's Revolutionary Army, ERP. Common criminals are held responsible for one case in Antioquia and one in Valle del Cauca. Direct responsibility for mine-related accidents or incidents is attributable to the Military Forces in only one case, which took place at the Naranjitos Military

⁵ National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Base, in the department of Arauca. A soldier died on that occasion. In addition, there were two accidents in mine clearance procedures carried out by the Military Forces.

From the facts mentioned above it is clear that the problem of anti-personnel mines in Colombia is directly linked to the current armed conflict, in which the FARC, the ELN and the self-defense groups play the most significant part. The Military Forces have discontinued the use of these weapons. According to a Ministry of Defense document, landmines were laid in the past for perimeter protection only, and the areas involved are clearly marked out and raised up to prevent accidents.



GEOGRAPHY OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES IN COLOMBIA

The information gathered by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines makes it possible to conclude that the problem of anti-personnel mines affects a large proportion of the country. Out of a total of 1,097 Colombian municipalities, 140, in 22 of the 31 departments, were the scene of accidents or incidents involving landmines during the ten first months of 2001 (see map). In other words, there are anti-personnel mines scattered in 12.8 per cent of Colombia's municipalities. The department worst hit is undoubtedly Arauca. Not only has the highest number of victims been recorded there (see below), but five out of its seven municipalities (71.4 per cent) have seen accidents or incidents associated with anti-personnel mines. In Antioquia the number of municipalities affected is 34, most of them in the east and south of the department, on a geographical zone stretching into the departments of Santander and Norte de Santander, where accidents or incidents have taken place in 13 and 11 municipalities respectively.

The frequency of landmine accidents or incidents is particularly high in certain municipalities. Araucita, in Arauca, had the worst record between January and October 2001, with 13 cases. Next on the list are Barrancabermeja, Santander (11), Tame, Arauca (10), Cocorná, Antioquia (8), San Pablo, Bolívar (7), y Arauca (Arauca), Suratá (Santander), Morales (Bolívar), and San Calixto (Norte de Santander), with five accidents or incidents each.

Although mines are present, and accidents or incidents take place, chiefly in rural areas, urban areas are not exempt from this hazard. During the period under consideration urban areas suffered 14 per cent of accidents or incidents, that is, 34. The towns and villages of Santander were worst affected. In this department there were 14 accidents or incidents associated with anti-personnel mines during the first ten months of 2001. Antioquia and Arauca each suffered six accidents or incidents in urban areas.

A framework provided by international humanitarian law for the eradication of anti-personnel mines

The use of anti-personnel mines is restricted by international humanitarian law. Two of the most important regulations in this respect come from common laws of war, and apply to **all parties to any** armed conflict:

- Parties to a conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants, and shall not attack civilian persons. In accordance with this principle, they should NEVER use any weapon of **indiscriminate effects**.
- It is prohibited to employ weapons of a nature to cause unnecessary losses or excessive suffering". This means that any weapon conceived to cause more damage than necessary, even when it is aimed against combatants only, is illegal and its use is not allowed.

Anti-Personnel Mines and the Internal Armed Conflict in Colombia

- During the first ten months of 2001, one person has been the victim of landmine accidents every 1.8 days on average.
- Of the total number of victims (162), 63 per cent are members of the Military Forces, and 27 per cent are civilians. Twenty per cent are children.
- Nineteenth per cent of all victims died at the scene of the accident. Survivors suffer permanent disabilities.
- So far this year (2001), 105 members of the National Army have been the victims of anti-personnel mines. Thirty-four of them died. 67.65 per cent of those killed and 81.69 per cent of those injured are volunteer soldiers. Of all mine deaths of military personnel, 57.1 per cent took place in combat, and 40 per cent in patrolling operations.
- Medical care is made more difficult by the distance between the place of the accident and hospitals, and by ignorance about first aid. There are also limitations as regards social and economic rehabilitation.
- During the ten first months of this year 140 municipalities, out of a total of 1,097 (12.8 per cent of Colombia's municipalities) were hit by anti-personnel mines.
- Fifty nine per cent of accidents or incidents took place in 39 municipalities. Those with a largest number of accidents or incidents are: Arauquita (Arauca), 13; Barrancabermeja (Santander), 11; Tame (Arauca) 10; Cocorná (Antioquia), 8.
- Of the total number of armed confrontations in the country (6,395), an average of 21 per day (243) were associated with accidents or incidents involving mines or explosive devices left behind.
- Those responsible are unknown in 42 per cent of cases. Fifty seven per cent of mine events are attributable to illegal groups as follows: 25.9 per cent to the ELN, 30 per cent to the FARC, 1.6 per cent to the self-defense Groups, and a similar proportion to common criminals.
- Eighty six per cent of accidents or incidents take place in rural areas. Of particular significance is the occurrence of mine-related events in urban areas of Santander (46 per cent of all events in this department), and of Arauca and Antioquia (18.8 per cent and 10.3 per cent respectively).

THE HUMAN COST

The human cost is without doubt the most significant factor to be taken into account in connection with anti-personnel mines and explosive devices left behind. The human cost is high in Colombia, and it is difficult to calculate it accurately because of the lack of a reliable information system. It is a known fact that the information methods currently in use in Colombia fail to record the real number of victims of anti-personnel mines. Nevertheless, the provisional figures now available can give an approximate idea of the magnitude of the problem. According to figures compiled by the Observatory on Mines, during the first ten months of 2001 the number of landmine accidents amounted to 162, which means that, on average, one person had a landmine accident every 1.8 days. Out of the total number of victims, 31 died and 131 were injured, many of them mutilated and disabled for life. Coinciding with the international trend, the vast majority of the victims are men, mostly military personnel. As a matter of fact, 63 per cent of those killed or injured are soldiers or members of the Police, and 27 per cent are civilians. The largest numbers among the latter are under 18 years of age. Five children died and 27 were injured, while only four of all the victims are women. What the victims were doing at the time of the accident is unknown in 39 per

cent of cases. The information available indicate that in 54 per cent of cases the victims were carrying out military or police operations, including combat operations and patrolling⁶. One of the problems is, of course, the distance between the place of the accident and hospitals, which is compounded by the ignorance of those present about first aid treatment. Nineteen per cent of the victims of all accidents this year died at the scene.

National Army figures show the share of the human cost of anti-personnel mines that the Army has. According to Ministry of Defense data, during the period under consideration 34 members of the army and the police died as a consequence of the explosion of anti-personnel mines, and 71 were injured. Of those killed, 67.65 per cent were volunteer soldiers, as were 81.69 per cent of those injured. At the same time, 8.82 per cent of those killed and 4.23 per cent of those injured were regular soldiers. More than half of the members of the Army who died and almost all of those who were injured (57.1 per cent and 95.8 per cent respectively) were involved in combat operations at the time of the accident⁷.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ministry of National Defense, Technical Office for Health, November 2001.

The largest number of victims was recorded in the department of Arauca (31), followed by Antioquia, Bolívar and Santander, with 22 victims each. In Norte de Santander there were 16 victims, while the figure for Cundinamarca was 14.

It is almost unnecessary to place emphasis here on the psychological and social consequences suffered by the victims mutilated by anti-personnel mines. A whole life of disability, with its obvious repercussions in emotional and labor terms, awaits them. In economic terms, apart from the production lost through the victim's disability, the cost for the country in respect of medical care is quite considerable. The United Nations has estimated the lifetime care of each victim at between US\$ 5,000 and US\$ 7,000 on average, although in the case of Ken Rutherford, the American mentioned above, after a few years the medical bills had exceeded a quarter of a million dollars.

STATE RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

The action taken by the Colombian government in connection with anti-personnel mines has a fundamental framework in its policy on the promotion, respect and guarantee of human rights and the application of international humanitarian law. This policy provides meaning and direction to all measures currently being implemented or planned. In essence, these measures consist in the destruction of all mines, both active and stockpiled, the prevention of accidents and the care of the victims. Account should always be taken of the fact that the context in which these measures are implemented is the internal armed conflict, with all the limitations and obstacles it poses, that constitute formidable challenges to an effective government action.

With the aim of mitigating the effects of the conflict and ensuring the application of international humanitarian law, the government promoted Colombia's approval of the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction*. This was achieved with the passing of Law 554 of January 14, 2000. The Law was assessed by the Constitutional Court, which confirmed its constitutionality through ruling C-991 of August 2, 2000. The instrument of ratification was deposited by President Andrés Pastrana Arango on September 6, 2000, on the occasion of the Millennium Summit. The Convention entered into force in Colombia on 1st March, 2001.



The Ottawa Convention, as this international instrument is called, in its general provisions (Article 1) commits the State Parties, “never under any circumstances” to use anti-personnel mines; to develop, produce, otherwise acquire, stockpile, retain or transfer to anyone, directly or indirectly, anti-personnel mines; to assist, encourage or induce, in any way, anyone to engage in any activity prohibited to a State Party under the Convention. Furthermore, each State Party undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. As discussed above, the Military Forces have already started to comply with these stipulations.

In order to facilitate the application of the Ottawa Convention, and as part of the Presidential Program for the Promotion, Respect and Guarantee of Human Rights and the Application of International Humanitarian Law, the government introduced a **Program for the prevention of landmine accidents and the care of the victims**. It comprises two main components. Firstly, the Observatory on Anti-personnel Mines, which started to operate by the end of 2000 and is conceived as a technical instrument to compile, systematize and update information, and to facilitate decision-making in connection with prevention, signposting, mapping, and the care of the victims. With funds provided by the Peace Investment Fund, the Observatory started in August 2001 to carry out territorial programs in 16 municipalities in the departments of Antioquia, Bolívar and Santander. The second component comprises all actions relating to the care of the victims. Its main areas include the educational and labor integration of the victims, the setting up of health and rehabilitation groups, programs to ensure the accessibility of transport and public buildings, and the provision of humanitarian aid intended for the victims of terrorist attacks.

In addition to the Program for Prevention and the care of the victims, the government created, through Decree 2113 of

Preventive measures

- An area where an anti-personnel mine accident or incidents has taken place is a mined area. Mayors should, as soon as possible, take all necessary measures to ensure that all mined areas under their jurisdiction are clearly demarcated, guarded and protected with fences or by any other means, in order to ensure that civilians are effectively kept out from them.
- Whenever there is a suspicion that an area may be mined or contain explosive devices left behind, the mayor and the municipal ombudsman must be informed, so that they can order the necessary warning signs to be placed. Special care must be taken in places where armed confrontations have taken place, where trenches or abandoned camps exist, in deserted or isolated areas, and near military bases or telecommunications or electricity installations.
- Anti-personnel mines have a variety of shapes, forms and sizes. They can be made of wood, steel, other metals, or plastic. They can have a spherical, rectangular, square, cylindrical, conical or dome shape. Mines can be difficult to see. They can be buried in the ground or hidden in the grass, concealed in the trees or left floating in the water. They can also be hidden in cans, toys, boxes, and so on.
- An anti-personnel mine is fired by physical contact with a person, an animal or an object, or by a light pressure on it, like that exerted by the weight of a foot.
- Anti-personnel mines may shift because of the rains, the overflow of a river, or an earthquake. With the passage of time and because of exposure to the elements, mines can rust or change its appearance. Yet they continue to be lethal explosive devices.
- Abandoned or unidentified objects must not be touched. Neither should anything be thrown over them. You must not kick or hit them in any way, or attempt to burn them. Under no circumstances should members of the public attempt to deactivate an anti-personnel mine or an explosive device left behind, such as a grenade or a gas cylinder. It is a highly technical task.
- Signs of the existence or suspected existence of a minefield include the following: the presence of injured or dead animals in the area, mutilated in unknown circumstances, the existence of burned out or fallen trees, wires or detonators, or an unusual change in the vegetation or the soil.
- When you see a sign warning of anti-personnel mines, the existence of a minefield must be understood. Under no circumstances should the signs be removed. Stop immediately, and go back retracing your steps. Warn other people walking in the area or road.

October 8, 2001, the National Inter-Agency Commission on Action Against Anti-Personnel Mines, and the Technical Committees on Prevention and the care of the victims, and on Signposting, Mapping and Mine Removal. The Commission, of the highest level, is made up by the Vice President of Colombia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defense, the Minister of Health, the Minister of the Interior, and the Director of the National Planning Department, or their representatives. Its principal functions include ensuring that the obligations assumed by Colombia as a State Party to the Ottawa Convention are fulfilled, proposing the administrative legal, and any other kind of measures that are necessary to prevent and punish any activity prohibited to a State Party under the Convention, and promoting and coordinating cooperation between the State, civil society and the international community.

Furthermore, a request of the Defense Minister, Gustavo Bell-Lemus, led to the establishment of a Ministerial Committee of the Military Forces General Command, responsible for defining and ensuring agreement within the Military Forces and with other State agencies about the action to be taken against anti-personnel mines. In addition, discussions are in progress on a Senate Bill “Establishing rules to ensure compliance with the Convention on the Prohibition of the

Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, and adopting regulations to eradicate the use of anti-personnel mines in Colombia”.

It is clear that Colombia is just beginning to uncover and find solutions to its anti-personnel mine problem. Ridding the country of this hidden threat is not going to be an easy task. Above all, it is not going to be cheap or quick, particularly if account is taken of the realities of the armed conflict. A National Planning Department study calculates the cost of deactivating each of the mines scattered in the country at between US\$ 144 and US\$ 221. If the hypothesis that close to 70,000 mines are laid in Colombia proves true, and working on the assumption that the armed conflict will come to an end within ten years, and also that adequate funds are raised, Colombia will be clear of mines in about twenty years⁸. None of this seems unachievable, at least for the time being. Anti-personnel mines have already caused enough death and suffering in the country, and it is about time that the illegal armed groups respond to the government’s appeal to commit themselves to humanitarian agreements that spare the civilian population from this source of terror.

⁸ Op cit, 3.

**Municipalities affected by accidents or incidents relating to anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind, and number of victims by department
1st January to 31 October 2001**

Department	No. of municipalities affected	Percentage of municipalities affected by department	No. of Victims
Amazonas	0	0%	0
Antioquia	34	27,2%	22
Arauca	5	71,4%	31
Atlántico	1	4,3%	0
Bolívar	9	19,6%	22
Boyacá	7	5,7%	1
Caldas	0	0%	0
Caquetá	6	37,5%	5
Casanare	1	5,3%	0
Cauca	5	12,5%	8
Cesar	7	28%	9
Chocó	3	13,6%	1
Córdoba	0	0%	0
Cundinamarca	10	8,5%	14
Guainía	0	0%	0
Guajira	2	14,3%	0
Guaviare	0	0%	0
Huila	3	8,1%	0
Magdalena	3	13%	3
Meta	5	17,2%	3
Nariño	2	3,2%	0
Norte de Santander	11	26,8%	16
Putumayo	6	46,2%	2
Quindío	0	0%	0
Risaralda	1	7,1%	0
Santander	13	14,9%	22
Sucre	2	8,3%	0
Tolima	1	2,1%	0
Valle del Cauca	2	4,8%	3
Vaupés	0	0%	0
Vichada	1	0%	0
Total	140	12,8%	162

Sources: National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

**Kinds of accidents / incidents, and military operations
1st January to 31 October 2001**

Department	No. of Accidents/ Incidents	Minefields	Suspected Minefields	Confiscation of mines or explosives	Clearance of Minefields	Confiscation and Clearance
TOTAL	243	74	4	93	52	19
Percentage of the total number of accidents/incidents	100%	30%	2%	38%	21%	8%

Sources: National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

**What the victims were doing at the time of the accident or incident involving anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind
1st January to 31 October 2001**

Total No. of Victims	Agriculture Cattle Raising Hunting Fishing	%	Going to School / Playing	%	In a vehicle/ with a farm animal	%	Military / Police Operation	%	Unknown	%
162	1	1%	6	4%	4	2%	88	54%	63	38.9%

Sources: National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

**Parties responsible for accidents or incidents involving anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind
1st January to 31 October 2001**

PARTIES	No. of Accidents/ Incidents	Percentages
FARC	73	30%
ELN	63	25.9%
SELF-DEFENSE GROUPS	4	1.6%
MILITARY FORCES	1 ⁽¹⁾	0.41%
OTHER	3	1.2%
UNKNOWN	102	42%
TOTAL	243	100%

Comments: 1. Military Forces, refers to an accident at the Naranjitos Military Base.

2. Three of the accidents/incidents took place as a consequence of FARC-ELN joint actions.

Sources: National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

**Kinds of devices involved in accidents or incidents caused by anti-personnel mines or explosives left behind
1st January to 31 October 2001**

KINDS OF DEVICES	No. of Accidents/ Incidents	Percentages
ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE	211	87%
EXPLOSIVE LEFT BEHIND (GRENADE)	10	4.1%
EXPLOSIVE LEFT BEHIND (GAS CYLINDER)	19	7.8%
OTHER	3	1%
TOTAL	243	100%

Comment: Six incidents involved confiscation/clearance of both anti-personnel mines and explosives left behind.

Sources: National Strategy Room of the President's Office, based on the Administrative Department of Security, DAS daily newsletter and Weekly Press Monitoring Records of the Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.

Processed by the Observatory on Anti-Personnel Mines. Georeferencing: Observatory of the Presidential Program for Human Rights and IHL, Vice President's Office.