



The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Colombia newsletter informs about the main technical assistance activities carried out through the projects implemented in the country to strengthen the mine action sector, in conjunction with the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (OACP, in Spanish) - **Descontamina Colombia**.

2022: a year to renew our commitment to communities affected by the presence of explosive ordnance in Colombia



In 2021 the world learned to live with Covid-19 and the mine action sector in Colombia was no exception. Unfortunately, the pandemic was not the only challenge we faced. The escalation of conflict dynamics in areas such as the border with Venezuela and the Pacific coast region, which included the use of new anti-personnel landmines (APM) by illegal armed groups, represented a major challenge for the work of mine action organizations.

Amidst this complex scenario, the sector took great strides to address the needs of communities affected by the presence of EO. Thanks to the technical assistance we provided and the joint work with our partners, UNMAS achieved in 2021:

- **Support and strengthen the capacity of the national authority of the mine action sector, OACP/Descontamina Colombia, in the territories most affected by the presence of mines.**
- **Provide grants to local organizations to carry out Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) activities in seven of the departments most affected by EO.**
- **Support HUMANICEMOS DH in the consolidation of its humanitarian demining operations in Caquetá, which resulted in the handover of its first mine-free area in October.**
- **To carry out the first theoretical course in Colombia on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Level 2, which strengthens the operational capacities of the sector.**

*These and other UNMAS contributions were possible thanks to the leadership of the Colombian Government and the support of our donors: the **European Union**, through the **European Trust Fund for Peace**; and the Governments of **Germany, Denmark, Italy, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea**.*

*New challenges call us to continue our work. The 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview estimates the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance from mine action in Colombia at 479,000, doubling the figure estimated for 2021. Rural, indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, who are the most affected, expect us, the organizations in the sector, to continue supporting them to prevent more people from becoming victims of the horror generated by anti-personnel mines, because **behind every mine victim there is a terrified community**. That is why this year we are renewing our commitment to the communities affected by the presence of explosive ordnance in Colombia.*

In 2022, our partners can be sure that UNMAS will remain a key ally so that together we can continue contributing to the goal of a mine-free Colombia, in compliance with the common goal of a mine-free world by 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Pablo Parra

Acting Chief of Mine Action Programme - UNMAS Colombia



Ilene Cohn, Acting Director of UNMAS, visited Colombia

Between 15 and 19 November, Acting Director of UNMAS **Ilene Cohn visited Colombia to review the work of the mine action sector and humanitarian coordination in the country to assist communities impacted by anti-personnel mines.** During her five-day visit, she met with representatives of the OACP, donors, organizations of the humanitarian sector and the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP, in Spanish) to know in detail the contributions that UNMAS Colombia is providing to the partners and to strengthen cooperation. In addition, she visited the municipality of Tierralta, Córdoba - one of the most affected by anti-personnel mines - to learn about the work of EORE and Victims Assistance (VA) carried out by Corporación Paz y Democracia, with the support of the Government of Germany and UNMAS.

UNMAS Global Director (in the center, black shirt) with members of Corporación Paz y Democracia, and the beneficiary community in Tierralta, Córdoba. Photo: Catalina Velásquez / UNMAS



Colombia obtains the presidency in 2022 of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines

Last November, **Colombia obtained for the first time the presidency of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines (known as the Ottawa Convention)** for the year 2022. The election took place in The Hague, the Netherlands, during the 19th Meeting of State Parties to the Convention, which addressed the challenges faced by the sector due to funding shortages and new contamination in countries that had already declared the end of their mine clearance efforts. Following the election, Colombia's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Ms. Alicia Arango, highlighted some of the country's priorities while holding the presidency of the convention: fostering cooperation among State Parties; further developing technical assistance among mine-affected States; promoting EORE; and strengthening the participation of landmine survivors.

Colombia's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Alicia Arango, addressing the nearly 500 delegates from 89 States Parties and 12 observer States participating in the Convention. Photo: from Twitter account @MineBanTreaty



Christelle Loupforest, Global Deputy Director of the Mine Action Area of Responsibility, visited Colombia

Christelle Loupforest, Global Deputy Director of the Mine Action Area of Responsibility (MA AoR) based in Geneva, Switzerland, visited Colombia in October. **With her visit, Loupforest sought to encourage greater participation of local actors in mine action coordination structures, strengthen alliances with strategic partners and give visibility to humanitarian needs in Colombia.** As part of her agenda, she met with actors from the humanitarian sector, donors, government representatives and visited the municipality of Tumaco, Nariño, to learn about the EORE and VA work implemented by the CIREC Foundation in this region, with the support of the Government of Germany and UNMAS.

Loupforest met with anti-personnel mine victims and was impressed by the story of Luz Dary Landazury (yellow shirt), who after surviving a landmine accident became a leader of an organization that facilitates EORE on the Pacific Coast of Colombia to prevent new accidents. Photo: CIREC.

“ Because there are so many crises in the world, we have somehow neglected Colombia... While there is a peace process, we need to strengthen mine action to have an emergency response in areas where the conflict is still ongoing ”

Christelle Loupforest, Global Deputy Director of the MA AoR



UNMAS and OACP conclude first theoretical course on Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Level 2 in Colombia

The Operations and Technical Assistance team of UNMAS Colombia, together with OACP-Descontamina Colombia, concluded last November the first theoretical course on Explosive Ordnance Disposal Level 2 (EOD IMAS & NTC AICMA) in which 50 members of humanitarian demining organizations and other institutions of the mine action sector participated. 42 of the participants achieved the certification issued by OACP and UNMAS. **This theoretical course will be complemented by a practical course in which 25 of those certified in November will participate, to be held from January 17 to 29, 2022.** Upon completion of these courses, which are supported by the Republic of Korea, the national capabilities for the destruction of explosive ordnance will be more robust and the communities affected by the presence of these devices will be the greatest beneficiaries.

The theoretical course of EOD Level 2 was financially supported by the cooperation of the Republic of Korea in Colombia. Reference photo / UNMAS.



UNMAS External Monitoring Component receives recognition from OACP for its contributions to mine action

Elena Gómez and Miguel Herrera, members of the External Monitoring Component (CEM, in Spanish) of UNMAS Colombia, received recognition from the OACP for their contributions to the fulfillment of the mine action policy of the National Government. **Both are in charge of monitoring and verifying the quality of humanitarian demining operations of HUMANICEMOS DH,** an organization formed by ex-combatants that emerged from the 2016 Peace Agreement. Eight members of HUMANICEMOS DH who are engaged in mine action work, and personnel from other organizations in the mine action sector who excelled in their work during 2021, were also recognized at this award ceremony.

CEM members with Lina Castillo, Head of Project Unit of UNMAS; and Pablo Parra, Acting Chief of UNMAS Colombia. Photo: UNMAS.

In images

UN Secretary General, António Guterres, visited Colombia and recognized the work of HUMANICEMOS DH



Photos courtesy: UNIC Bogotá / UN Verification Mission in Colombia.

During his visit to Colombia to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the Peace Agreement, UN Secretary General António Guterres visited La Paz es Productiva Fair in Bogotá on November 24, where reintegration projects that emerged after the 2016 agreement participated. During this visit, **Secretary Guterres was able to talk briefly with the Acting Chief of UNMAS Colombia, Pablo Parra, and with Germán Balanta, field manager of HUMANICEMOS DH,** a mine action organization made up of FARC ex-combatants and supported by the European Trust Fund for Peace and UNMAS. HUMANICEMOS DH has been recognized as one of the most powerful results of the peace process in Colombia for the work being done by ex-combatants to eliminate one of the most nefarious legacies of the conflict: anti-personnel mines.

Our results - Regional Coordination Project

The Regional Coordination Project developed activities during the last quarter of 2021 supporting the OACP in the territories most affected by explosive ordnance. These are some of the outstanding activities carried out by the regional and local coordinators*.



CAUCA

Local coordinator supports victims of multiple APM accident in Argelia

On October 30, there was a multiple landmine accident in the municipality of Argelia that left 8 new victims, who were sent to the city of Popayán for medical care. In conjunction with the mine action actors, the regional coordinator in Cauca coordinated support for the victims and guidance for their families on medical and administrative procedures during their stay in Popayán.

Identification of areas contaminated with APM after clashes in Argelia

In view of the increase in hostilities in Argelia, Cauca, the local population was assisted and information on the location of areas contaminated by explosive ordnance in the municipality was obtained. During November, landmine incident forms were filed with information on some 30 allegedly mined areas in the municipality and the National Army reported the destruction of more than 50 APM.



CHOCÓ

Indigenous communities of Chocó learn safe behaviors in relation to APMs



On November 25 and 26, the regional coordinator conducted workshops on EORE for representatives of the CAMIZOSBA indigenous organization, leaders and authorities of more than 20 ethnic communities of Bajo Baudó region. The objective of the workshop was to promote safe behaviors to mitigate the danger posed by explosive ordnance in these communities.



GUAVIARE

Students and teachers from San José del Guaviare participate in EORE workshops



On November 12, an EORE workshop aimed at teachers, managers and students of educational institutions was held in the municipality of San José del Guaviare, in order to promote safe behaviors and so that teachers can replicate this information to their students. This is the municipality of Guaviare that has registered the most APM victims (133) from 1990 to 2021.



META

Officials of the Governor's Office of Meta receive an EORE workshop



On December 6, the regional coordinator held an EORE workshop in Villavicencio for 30 officials of the Human Rights and Peace Secretariat of the Department, in order to make them aware of the context of contamination by explosive ordnance in the Department, and promote safe behaviors since many of them carry out field work.

Students of the municipality of Puerto Concordia are sensitized on EORE



On November 17, 2021, an EORE workshop was held for 40 students of the Nueva Esperanza Educational Institution from the municipality of Puerto Concordia. This activity was carried out in coordination with the Municipal Mayor's Office and the Governor's Office of Meta.



NORTE DE SANTANDER

Bucarasica officials, teachers and youth leaders receive EORE and training in mine action policy



On November 3 and 4, in the municipality of Bucarasica, EORE awareness-raising and dissemination of the mine action policy were held for municipal officials, teachers and youth leaders. During the meetings, the components of mine action and their regulations were explained, as part of the activities included in the municipal Prevention Plan 2021.



NARIÑO

160 Indigenous Guards receive awareness workshops in EORE



On December 6 and 7, EORE awareness workshops were held in the Llorente community, Tumaco, for 160 Indigenous Guards of the Organization of Indigenous Reservations of the Pacific Coast (ORIPAP, in Spanish). **These workshops were requested by indigenous and local authorities, who denounced a humanitarian emergency** due to clashes between armed groups, confinements and restrictions to mobility due to the presence of explosive ordnance. The event was supported by the Presidency of the Republic and the Pastoral Social.

Tumaco officials trained to improve attention to landmine victims



On December 6, the Victims Assistance Route (VA Route) was presented to the Committee for Mine Action of Tumaco, which is composed of delegates from the municipal mayor's office, hospitals, and the Victims Committee, among others. The attendees learned about the requirements to activate the VA Route and the duties of each institution, seeking to fill the gaps previously identified, particularly in medical care. During 2021 Tumaco was the second municipality in Colombia with more APM victims.



PUTUMAYO

Local coordinator raises awareness with EORE to indigenous communities affected by APM



On November 22, in the municipality of Mocoa, the regional coordinator provided training on safe behaviors to leaders of the Siona, Cofanes, Emberá Katio, Nasa and Muruy (Witoto) ethnics communities. **The workshop was requested by the departmental authority due to the presence of illegal armed actors in the territories of the indigenous communities** and the growing suspicion of the presence of APM that put the communities at high risk, especially children.



VALLE DEL CAUCA

Government of Valle del Cauca proposes to start a demining pilot in Buenaventura



On November 10, the regional coordinator provided technical assistance to the Governor's Office during a security council held in the municipality of Guadalajara de Buga. The meeting reviewed the security context and analyzed reports of increased EO contamination in communities in Valle del Cauca. During this Council, it was proposed to micro-focalize the municipality of Buenaventura to initiate a humanitarian demining pilot, for which it was first proposed to strengthen the EORE in this region.

**Photos and information: Territorial Management Project Team. Activities developed between October and December 2021.*

The UNMAS Colombia team



Ayiseliz Moreno
Regional Coordinator
Chocó Department

Ayiseliz is a biologist with emphasis in Natural Resources and Technologist in Occupational Health. She has more than three years of work experience in the mine action sector. She has collaborated with organizations such as the Peace and Democracy Corporation, the Colombian Campaign to Ban Landmines (CCCM, in Spanish) and the mine action component of the Organization of American States (OAS), supporting Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and Victim Assistance. She is certified by the OACP and the National Apprenticeship Service (SENA) to teach basic and emergency EORE. **Ayiseliz has helped dozens of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in the department of Chocó to learn about safe behaviors that help prevent new landmine accidents and save lives.**

About UNMAS Colombia

Since 2010, UNMAS has supported the National Mine Action Center of Colombia, under the direction of the OACP, humanitarian demining, victim assistance and explosive ordnance risk education organizations, to increase the capacity of the mine action sector and strengthen its coordination and regulatory frameworks, considering best global practices. UNMAS works in Colombia with the support of the **European Union**, through the **European Trust Fund for Peace**; and the Governments of **Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea**, whom we thank for their contributions in 2021 and 2022.

