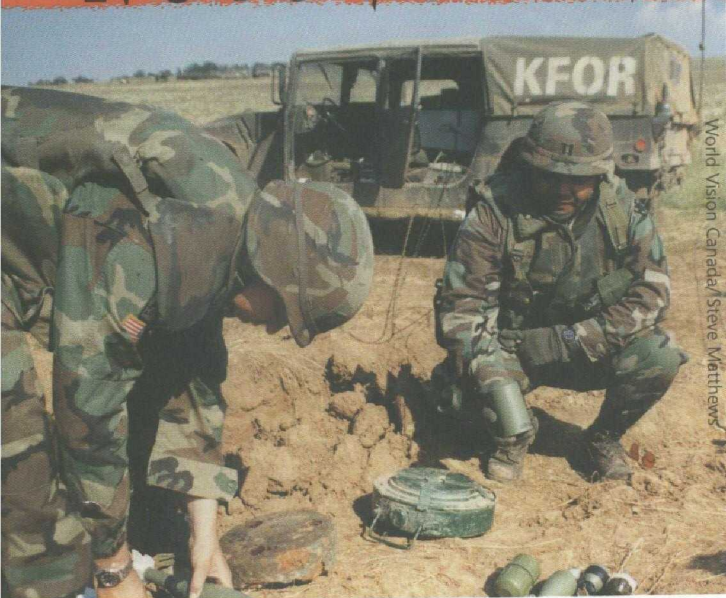


KOSOVO MINE CRISIS



World Vision Canada/Steve Matthews

United Nations KFOR members with AP and AT mines retrieved in Kosovo, later destroyed at a nearby American Forces facility.

In the aftermath of Serbian occupation and subsequent NATO air strikes against Serb forces, Kosovo faces serious contamination from mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). These explosives pose an immediate threat to people's lives and seriously impede delivery of humani-

Kosovo demining snapshot¹

Number of recorded minefields	616
Number of known cluster-bomb strike areas	333
Number of mine/UXO casualties ²	300
Square metres of land cleared by UNMACC ²	4,940,560
Number of houses cleared ²	13,702
Number of schools cleared ²	559
Estimated number of years to clear mines/UXO	2-3

1. Information provided by the UN
2. From June to November 1999

UN coordination central to Kosovo clearance

tarian assistance and the rebuilding of homes, infrastructure, essential services and the norms of civil society. The United Nations, through the UN Mine Action Service and other agencies, has been central in coordi-

inating the response to this crisis.

Efforts to deal with the impending threat began even before hostilities ended. With thousands of refugees massed in border camps, UNICEF—the UN lead agency in mine awareness education—coordinated a public information campaign aimed at informing refugees about the mine/UXO threat that they could find upon returning to their homes in Kosovo.

The principal mine threat is from mines laid by the Serbian Armed Forces, police and paramilitary forces, particularly along the borders with Albania and Macedonia. Some defensive minefields are located in the interior and nuisance mines were placed in and around villages and essential infrastructure. Although the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) also used mines, these have been reported as cleared in accordance with the requirements of a Military Technical Agreement signed with NATO.

The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) was established soon after an initial UN assessment mission in June 1999. The MACC is now effective in the operational coordination and

tasking of 17 accredited mine clearance organisations (NGOs and commercial companies) working on defined priorities. Simply put, these priorities are to get refugees back into their homes or on to their land and to support the reconstruction and rehabilitation of essential services and infrastructure before the arrival of winter.

All mine action companies and NGOs have to be accredited by the MACC and must meet minimum standards of training, equipment, procedures, medical coverage and communications. Materials being disseminated for mine awareness must match the International Guidelines for Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Awareness Education.

A number of organisations have provided training for local mine clearance capacity and, to date, more than 500 local deminers have been recruited.

The main mine awareness programs being implemented are community-based activities including the "Safer Village" concept and the "Child to Child" program. The Child to Child program was implemented because mine/UXO awareness will not become part of the school curriculum until November 2000. It focuses on the child as trainer of other children and parents in the home, using traditional games and activities. This program is also supported by a clearance team which undertakes immediate clearance tasks along with the identification and marking of "child safe areas".

Burin Perteshi, 12, lost his leg to a landmine while picking strawberries.



AP Photo/Pier Paolo Cito

Already there have been occasions when children have used their training to report cluster bombs and UXO.

The Safer Village concept looks at the specific needs of a village and tries to provide alternative solutions to risk-taking behaviours. This may be the provision of firewood over winter until a dangerous firewood collection area can be cleared.

Among the 300 casualties recorded to date, there have been 54 deaths. The rate at which the casualties are occurring has stabilized somewhat in recent months at approximately 40 per month. Deterioration of the public health system poses a considerable challenge in dealing with the short and long-term needs of survivors. The lead agency for victim assistance is the World Health Organization (WHO), which along with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a number of NGO partners such as Handicap International and the Mother Teresa Society, are developing the means to provide comprehensive medical and rehabilitation care to mine victims.

— UN MAS

The Canadian response

On November 1, the Canadian government announced a comprehensive aid package of \$100 million for Kosovo and the Balkans. Of this, \$5 million over the next two years will be devoted to institutional support for the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre, mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance.

Canada's support for Kosovo mine action started even before peace came to the region: With support from CIDA, UNICEF began essential mine awareness education among refugees as they waited in border camps for a chance to return to their homes.

Canadians were also at the forefront when peace came in June: As they led the way for UN forces entering Kosovo after Serb withdrawal, the soldiers of Edmonton's 1 Combat Engineer Regiment were among the first outsiders to witness the extent of damage inflicted on this tiny province. The demining and disposal expertise of these military engineers was cru-

cial in clearing landmines, booby traps and other explosives (UXO) from roadways and bridges to allow security forces and humanitarian relief to enter.

Canada's push for a coordinated 'rapid response' to the landmines crisis in Kosovo was driven by an early recognition that mines and UXO would be a major threat to civilians in the aftermath of the war. In June, Canada and Belgium co-financed the first UN Mine Action Service mission to the region to establish a plan for coordinating the global mine action effort.

A key outcome of this mission was the establishment of the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre (MACC) in Pristina. Three Canadian National Defence staff members were seconded to assist in setting up a database and mapping landmines and unexploded ordnance in Kosovo through the MACC. So far they have contributed to the production and con-

Continued next page