

Landmines



Republic of Colombia



Q: Do the Colombian Armed Forces manufacture, plant or store antipersonnel mines?

A: No. The Colombian Government signed the Ottawa Treaty on December 3, 1997, which it ratified on September 6, 2000 and it took effect in 2001. Since then, the production, use, storage and transfer of antipersonnel mines are prohibited and punishable with up to 20 years in prison. It also created the Antipersonnel Mine Observatory under the supervision of the Vice President of the Republic, as the government agency to apply the Ottawa Convention by means of different lines of action: survivor care, prevention and awareness programs, humanitarian demining, information management, and the institutionalization and sustainability of the National Action Plan against antipersonnel mines.

Q: What are Colombia's obligations as a signatory of the Ottawa Convention?

A: Colombia is obligated not to develop, produce, acquire, store, preserve or transfer antipersonnel mines and to destroy those that are in the State's stockpiles.

Q: What results has Colombia presented after signing the Ottawa Convention?

A: Colombia has no remaining capacity to build new landmines as it destroyed all its landmine manufacturing machines in 1999. Also, on October 24, 2004, Colombia destroyed the last of its 19,000 stockpiled landmines in a national event attended by the president and the Queen Noor of Jordan, supervised by the Vicepresidency and with the technical cooperation and assistance of the Canadian Embassy and the Organization of American States (OAS).

Q: What is the Government of Colombia doing in order to prevent terrorist actions carried out by FARC, ELN and AUC?

A: In 2002, 877 mine fields were detected, deactivated and destroyed in the country, and 705 in the year 2003. In addition, the public forces' seizures of explosives, explosive charges, explosive fuses, bomb-cylinders, explosive capsules and slow-burning fuses used to commit terrorist acts and manufacture antipersonnel mines have increased.

Q: What about landmines planted by the Colombian government before the signing of the Convention?

A: The only landmines remaining in Colombian military possession are those remaining in the ground as defensive measures around a few military installations, which are clearly marked, guarded by fences, and have not been enlarged since the Treaty entered into force in 2001.

As part of the agreements entered by Colombia with the Ottawa Convention, the Military Forces will start demining 23 fields in which there are around 3,000 landmines. The Government of Colombia has term until year 2011 to culminate this process.

Q: What guarantees that the Colombian Government is fulfilling its obligations as for the antipersonnel mines?

A: The process of destroying the mines stored by the Colombian military was overseen by the Canadian Government, the Swiss Government, international organizations such as the UN, the OAS and NGOs, including Landmine Monitor.

Q: Who plants landmines in Colombia?

A: At the present time, landmines are still being planted in Colombian territory by three terrorist groups: the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC, who have planted nearly 100,000 non-conventional mines in the country. 45 percent of the mines are planted by the FARC, 25 percent by the ELN, one percent by the AUC, and the rest cannot be determined.



Q: Where do these groups get the antipersonnel mines that they are planting?

A: These terrorist groups manufacture most of the mines they plant. According to Human Rights Watch's 2003 report "You'll Learn Not to Cry", the illegal armed groups frequently use children to do this kind of work.

Q: What is the process to demine a field?

A: It is a difficult process given the fact that the problem with antipersonnel mines in Colombia is unique: Most of the explosive devices are manufactured by terrorist groups in undercover operation centers. Many of the devices are difficult to detect because they are made out of non-conventional materials such as plastic, PVC or wood. The terrorist groups minefields are not planned and they are not delimited or marked. The mines are planted with no defined pattern, seeking to cause as much damage as possible.

Q: Who are the most common civilian victims of the antipersonnel mines?

A: Children and rural dwellers are the main civilian victims of antipersonnel mines. Some of the explosive devices are made deliberately to look like toys, radios or some other attractive shape for children. On other occasions, the mines are planted in the middle of crops, where the people working there accidentally detonate them..

Q: How often are victims of antipersonnel mines reported in Colombia?

A: In Colombia, on average two people are victims of these devices each day.

Q: Besides the physical damage, how do the antipersonnel mines affect the Colombian population?

A: The threat posed by antipersonnel mines has a direct impact on the lives of thousands of Colombians. Many people cannot cultivate the fields out of fear. In some regions, children do not play outside because they can be victims of these explosive devices. All these factors make the antipersonnel mines a decisive factor in the deadlock of national development.



Sources: National Ministry of Defense of Colombia: Anti-Personel Landmines Observatory (Vicepresidency of Colombia);Antipersonnel Mines accidents database, UNICEF, 2001; Human Rights Watch report, "You'll Learn not to Cry", 2003.