



INTERVENTION

BY

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ON

LAND RELEASE

*Your Royal Highness,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

When I was the Director General of Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) 10 years ago, I visited Kampot Province in the South of Cambodia and saw our deminers clearing area on a mountain side. When I stopped to ask them why they were clearing that area, which was not a priority, the Platoon Commander replied that they had cleared all the hazardous areas and no other areas in the province to do. At that time we had no comprehensive survey information on the landmine/ERW problem, but this incident made me realize the importance of effectively targeting clearance resources where they were needed most. With this in mind, we worked with Canada to get funding to do the first survey in Cambodia, which eventually took place from 2000-2002.

The Level One Survey provided the first indication of the scope of the problem, indicating that nearly 4,500 sq kms of land was suspected hazardous area. This made the scope of the task unmanageable and caused pessimism in both the Royal Government and our Development Partners about our ability to address the landmine and ERW problem in our lifetime.

While many argued with the findings of the survey, saying that the methodology used was too risk averse and over inflated the problem, Cambodia viewed it as a very useful baseline from which we could work. The map was further modified using a Level Two technical survey, which provided some help in refining the results.

Over 2003-2004, HALO Trust approached the Cambodian Mine Action Authority (CMAA) with substantial evidence of large areas of land which were identified as contaminated by the LIS, but were in productive use by the communities and had been for some time. The CMAA recognized the importance of this in terms of better prioritizing mine clearance, and held a series of consultations and technical discussions with the three operators, UNDP and other partners. Based on these meetings, the CMAA issued the draft Area Reduction Policy and presented it to the National Conference on Mine Action in May 2006, where it was adopted.

There were many arguments during the meeting, primarily concerned with managing the risks posed by rapid land release. I convinced the Conference eventually by paraphrasing the words of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan during the Opening for the High Diplomatic Conference in Oslo in September 1997: Even the fear of the presence of a landmine can terrorize whole villages. But in Cambodia, we saw that in many cases the villagers were no longer afraid, so this policy would allow us to focus our efforts on areas where casualties and fear still rule.

Land release through reclaimed land surveys in Cambodia is assisting us to make better choices about where and when we clear. Through a variety of techniques, over 200 million sqm was identified as low risk during 2006, while over 215 million sqm has been released during the first 9 months of this year. Cambodia believes that effective and safe management of the land release process will be critical to its ability to target mine clearance resources more effectively and work towards its Article 5 obligations. Part of the reason for this increase is a pilot project funded by Australia and implemented by MAG, where

several mobile survey teams have been recruited specifically to support this problem.

Currently, all information on reclaimed land is generated by the 3 main operators in Cambodia. However, the CMAA is in the process of developing national capacity to do this, through the existing Provincial Mine Action Committees. This will further support the decentralized decision making system used in Cambodia, by giving local authorities greater information for making policy decisions.

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This process to make better decisions on prioritization has been under development in Cambodia for nearly 10 years. We are happy to share our experiences with others and learn from theirs.

Thank You!