

DR Congo: Training of new Europeaid HMA teams

In a field, 5 km outside of the town of Kalemie, in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, 14 men and 13 women have been in training for more than three weeks.

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Ten of these trainees will form part of two new teams that are to work with humanitarian mine clearance under the "Humanitarian Mine Action Program" which is funded by Europeaid with 940 000 Euros and running from the 1st April 2006 until 31st March 2008.

It's early morning at DanChurchAid's HMA office in Kalemie. The trainees are ready for another day's work. In a long column of motorbikes, quads and a 4X4 car, the team sets off. It's a scenic ride along the shore of Lake Tanganyika, before the team turns off onto a very sandy road towards the training field.

During the past weeks the trainees have learnt about different types of mines, how to wear the necessary security equipment, how to use metal detectors, how to use a prodder and how to make casualty evacuations.

"The training is progressing well, you see development each day", says Masudi Kalosaleh, one of the three national team leaders, also a deminer himself.

Hard work in the dry heat

It is now coming towards the end of the dry season in Eastern DRC and it is hard work in the heat for the trainees. They have to concentrate on work in a very limited space while wearing the heavy personal protection equipment (PPE). In the future, when working with real mine clearance, one step out of the designated lane may mean the loss of a foot or leg.

The training is being supervised by international experts, Technical Advisers (TAs) with a long experience of mine clearance.

"If you are too curious in demining, you might have an accident", says TA Perparim Elezi, based on a long experience from places such as Kosovo and Iraq.

The curiosity he is referring to is the danger when a deminer runs ahead of himself or herself, for example when he or she spots a mine on the surface far ahead, gets excited and rushes to get to it, thereby slacking on safety rules.

Although it may seem complicated and dangerous, teamleader Masudi explains, it is all about staying focused: "When people hear about demining work they say oh no that's dangerous, you can die or lose a leg. But in fact it's a very simple job if you stay focused and follow the rules."

The trainees themselves have a very positive attitude towards their future jobs and are not scared off by the eventual dangers. They seem the more preoccupied with the future of their own country:

"I was aware of that it might be dangerous when I applied, but I know it will help our country and our population." [Muganza Sangoderick, aged 31]

The trainees will soon be ready for the real life as deminers in different parts of Eastern Congo that were ravaged by the civil war (1998-2003). Here mines and UXO still pose a great danger to returning refugees and IDPs. The mines also prevent the population from cultivating their fields, collecting wood and other vital daily activities.

Most of the trainees are IDPs recruited from two of the camps for internally displaced people (IDP) outside of Kalemie. Some of them will with all probability go and work with mine clearance in the areas they once fled from and pave the way for others to return to a safe environment.

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