The Mine Free Sarajevo project is something that has really facilitated and accelerated all of our efforts so far and we have finally seen the end—or the crown—of all of our demeaning activities: Vocgesic free of mines as part of the entire project. Something that certainly makes everyone proud, especially as the Mayor, is the final return and putting an end to the operation of the former SHAs. The development of our local community continues. I express my sincere gratitude to the donor in the realization of this project—the United States of America.

— Edin Smajic, Mayor of Vocgesic

THE MUNICIPALITY OF EAST STARI GRAD IN REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

The mayor of East Stari Grad, Boyo Gakarovic, also takes pride in this project, noting that it is a highlight of his years-long mandate in office. East Stari Grad spreads along the longest borderline between two entities making up Bosnia and Herzegovina: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. Since 1996, there have been twenty different demining tasks completed in this municipality, releasing a total of 500,000 sq m of land. The Mine Free Sarajevo project will now release an additional 500,000 sq meters of SHAs in this municipality, making it completely mine free. Currently, many roads in East Stari Grad still travel through the SHAs, and the surrounding households are “trapped” between minefields. The municipality also has important development projects that were stopped due to mine contamination, especially industrial and tourist projects. Resorts and other tourist attractions cannot operate without first resolving the hazard of ERW, including on and around Trebevic Mountain; however, part of the mountain remains contami ned with mines.

Soon, Trebevic Mountain and the rest of East Stari Grad will be cleared, and the mine warning signs removed, no longer diminishing the natural beauty of the mountain or causing fear and anxiety among visitors. Mayor Gakarovic is proud to be part of this positive story and happy to finally be able to say to local residents that they will soon be able to live safely.

When I heard about the Mine Free Sarajevo project initiative and the implementation of land release projects in four municipalities, I felt true happiness. The city I love and live in will finally be safe. Our mountains will be safe and I love these mountains. I am grateful...to everyone involved in this project.

— Miroslav Mihorics, mine survivor, Director of the Sitting Volleyball Club Fantoms in Sarajevo

CONCLUSION

Vocgesic and East Stari Grad are just two municipalities that will be mine-free by the end of the Mine Free Sarajevo project. This completion of this project will further spur interest in clearance and land release activities focused on making all of Bosnia and Herzegovina mine-free. Therefore, the project has even more far-reaching consequences: the productive use of once-contaminated land and social and economic development. However, above all else, the project will allow its residents to live safely. The impact of humanitarian mine action in the country is truly enormous. See endnotes page 65

Marija Trin
Project Manager
Mine Detection Dog Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Marija Trin has worked in mine action for twenty years, first at the Donor Relations Department at Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Center, and since 2003 at the Mine Detection Dog Center (MDDC) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Currently, she is a project manager for mine victims assistance and mine risk education projects, and public and donor relations within MDDC. Trin holds a university degree from the faculty of Graphic Arts from the University of Zagreb, Croatia. She has published many mine-action related articles in local and international publications.

Elise Becker
Vice President for Operations
Marshall Legacy Institute

Elise Becker is the Vice President for Operations at the Marshall Legacy Institute, where she manages many of the organization’s major programs, including the Mine Detection Dog Partnership Program and Peacekeepers and Problem Solvers Program. She has been in the mine action sector for over fourteen years, and previously served as the Frasure-Kruzel-Drew Fellow at the US Department of State. Becker earned her Bachelor of Arts from James Madison University and her Master’s in Public Administration from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Natalia Uršič
Project Manager
ITF Enhancing Human Security

Natalia Uršič has worked at ITF Enhancing Human Security (ITF) since 2001, first as the geographic information systems project manager, working with ArcGIS and Erdas Imaging, and since 2004 as ITF’s project manager. She works in the fields of mine victim assistance and UXO clearance, managing projects in various parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and the Gaza Strip. She graduated from the Faculty of the Arts at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, with a degree in geography and sociology.

Elise Becker

T he dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the subsequent Balkan Wars of the 1990s left large quantities of weapons and ammunition in poorly man aged stockpiles and in the hands of state actors, non-state actors, and civilians. The widespread proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) across the Western Balkans has led to a widely acknowledged problem concerning the diversion of weapons from police and military stockpiles for illicit use in Europe and elsewhere. The diversion of SALW due to poor physical security and stockpile management (PSM) practices is a driver of armed violence, criminality, and stunted economic growth.

Following a national regulatory assessment with Small Arms Survey (“the Survey”) in 2017, The HALO Trust (HALO) has worked with the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH) and the European Force in Bosnia (EUFOR) to professionally mark and register a state military stockpile of approximately 63,000 assorted SALW of over 280 different types. The project comprises a three-way partner ship between HALO, the AFBiH, and the UK-based company Pryor Marking Technology. However, the backbone of this unique project is not the marking process per se but the highly comprehensive database and record-keeping system, produced through research and the cata loging of the AFBiH SALW inventory.

With Bosnia and Herzegovina as a case study, this article discusses HALO’s needs-based approach in establishing the AFBiH Weapons Marking and Registration project, a first of its kind in the Western Balkans. It analyzes how the project’s success can be emulated in other countries across the region to bring about a sustainable solution to the problem of illicit SALW proliferation and diversion through technical expertise, collaboration, and national ownership.

A REGIONAL APPROACH TO SALW MARKING AND REGISTRATION

HALO developed its project in Bosnia and Herzegovina to enhance the implementation of both politically- and legally-binding regional and international frameworks relating to the marking and registration of SALW. At the international level, HALO’s work supports the UN Firearms Protocol, the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (UN Programme of Action), and the European Firearms Directive. In addition, the project directly relates to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 16 and its targets and relevant indicators 16.1, “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere,” and 16.4, “by 2030, significantly reduce illicit/arms flows.”

At present, the Western Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina falls within the country’s normative and political framework on arms control, including the EUFOR-coordinated “Ammunition, Weapons, and Explosives (AWE) Master Plan” and the government’s SALW Control Strategy (2016-2020). This project directly contributed to the Franco-German Initiative for the Western Balkans and the regional “Rampoad for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024,” coordinated by the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC). The Franco-German Rampoad stipulates seven goals, the majority of which are to be met by 2024. They relate to substantially reducing the supply, flow, and numbers of illicit SALW in the region while reducing the risk of proliferation and diversion.

The Rampoad is concerned with the illicit use and diversion of fire arms from both civilian and police possession and the strengthening of state institutions to address and handle the problem at the legislative and policy levels. A key example of a shortcoming the HALO project can address is the inconsistencies in the marking and registration of weapons seized and confiscated by police. The BIH Marking Law “does not require that weapons are marked at the time of their seizure or confiscation”, nor does it state categorically that weapons already in police and military ownership must be marked. As a result, good record keeping and tracking of these weapons is difficult. Strong insti tutions and faith in them is a key component of making the project a success, but there must be demonstrable, tangible outputs. The AFBiH project is a step forward to achieve buy-in from stakeholders and
donors, and with the right support, can supplement human security and development efforts across the region.

A SYSTEM TAILORED TO STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

The marking and registration of weapons is “an essential prerequisite for limiting the diversion and illicit proliferation of SALW.” In order to develop a system that addresses diversion, a tracing element must be present through a registration system. This function requires the development of a database so that the stockpile owner can make a weapon traceable through its entire life cycle. This function would reduce both start-up costs and the time required to establish a workable database in line with stakeholder wishes, ensuring that physical marking and registration can begin quickly. External monitoring and evaluation also allows for lessons learned to be implemented for future projects, including process improvements.

A sustainable solution through collaboration

As per the aforementioned framework, HALO, the Survey, and EUFOR determined that the system needed several key characteristics to make it sustainable. First, and in line with international standards such as the MOSAIC, the system will require the development of a database so that the stockpile owner can make a weapon traceable through its entire life cycle. Second, the system must provide a comprehensive weapons catalogue that forms the backbone of the data registration system and every edit is recorded. Any deleted entries can be recovered. Third, the system must be quickly and easily scanned, providing an operator with information instantaneously.

Security

Ensuring system and data integrity is paramount to maintaining the project in line with any data management system. Two issues arose and were addressed during the creation of the database: (1) the establishment of different authorization levels for users, both across the armed forces and at the ministerial level, and (2) the need to record individual user actions, allowing for tracking patterns of behavior by a specific user. To address these, the system must be secure, with selective options pertinent to a particular weapon. For example, the system must provide specific weapon details. For example, the system must provide specific weapon data, and it must be possible for the marking process to be quickly and easily scanned, providing an operator with information instantaneously.

Accessibility

The system permits specific users to have different authorization levels, from the unit level up to the relevant ministries. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the system is configured such that a base read and print function is available to all within the military concerned with unit-level logistics and PSSM. At a higher level, a write function allows users to add information for record-keeping purposes without amending the marking data, enabling these users to request a movement of weapons from one location to another. The Chief and Deputy Chiefs of the Joint Staff hold the highest level of access alongside representatives from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, who are able to authorize such a move, or in other circumstances, export, write off, or destroy weapons. Every decision is recorded within the system and is fully traceable, ensuring transparency in the handling and movement of SALW.

A sustainable solution through collaboration

As per the aforementioned framework, HALO, the Survey, and EUFOR determined that the system needed several key characteristics to make it sustainable. First, and in line with international standards such as the MOSAIC, the system requires the development of a database so that the stockpile owner can make a weapon traceable through its entire life cycle. This function would reduce both start-up costs and the time required to establish a workable database in line with stakeholder wishes, ensuring that physical marking and registration can begin quickly. External monitoring and evaluation also allows for lessons learned to be implemented for future projects, including process improvements.

Supportability

Further, the system must be quickly and easily scanned, providing an operator with information instantaneously.

A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION THROUGH COLLABORATION

As per the aforementioned framework, HALO, the Survey, and EUFOR determined that the system needed several key characteristics to make it sustainable. First, and in line with international standards such as the MOSAIC, the system requires the development of a database so that the stockpile owner can make a weapon traceable through its entire life cycle. This function would reduce both start-up costs and the time required to establish a workable database in line with stakeholder wishes, ensuring that physical marking and registration can begin quickly. External monitoring and evaluation also allows for lessons learned to be implemented for future projects, including process improvements.

Supportability

Further, the system must be quickly and easily scanned, providing an operator with information instantaneously.

A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION THROUGH COLLABORATION

As per the aforementioned framework, HALO, the Survey, and EUFOR determined that the system needed several key characteristics to make it sustainable. First, and in line with international standards such as the MOSAIC, the system requires the development of a database so that the stockpile owner can make a weapon traceable through its entire life cycle. This function would reduce both start-up costs and the time required to establish a workable database in line with stakeholder wishes, ensuring that physical marking and registration can begin quickly. External monitoring and evaluation also allows for lessons learned to be implemented for future projects, including process improvements.

Supportability

Further, the system must be quickly and easily scanned, providing an operator with information instantaneously.
two are men. As men comprise the majority of the AMRO marking teams, HALO and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) will carry out a joint project once COVID-19 restrictions permit that aims to raise awareness of the gender-based dynamics within the AMRO teams. A gendered, regional approach to SALW programming in the Balkans would benefit not only national stakeholders but would also drive positive and progressive development throughout the region.

Integration and data sharing. As the building blocks of the database software are Microsoft development tools and backend database platforms, not only does this mean the system has been developed using trusted and robust tools, it also offers flexibility and opportunity for an intuitive information exchange should future integration with other national, regional, or international information management and sharing systems be required. However, it is of the utmost importance to recognize the sovereignty of each beneficiary government as well as the political and cultural sensitivities prevalent throughout the Western Balkans. As such, the stakeholders state that “the choice for record keeping is a national prerogative”.

While there might be the temptation for stakeholders to shy away from acknowledging potential shortcomings in their SALW management systems, the prevention of diversion and the upholding of a sustainable marking and registration system requires an understanding of the problem, the means to address it, and the willingness to be transparent. Transparency is as much a political issue as it is a technical one, and the introduction of new processes often need to be accompanied with a positive shift in organizational culture in order to allow that process to succeed. There might be a hesitation to engage in data sharing due to a perceived lack of benefit either in the material sense or because there can be a tendency to view relationships as zero-sum. The utility of integrated registries across the Western Balkans is not a new idea. In 2016, a feasibility study stated that “failing to take action now on the subject of linking SALW registries will miss a significant opportunity to capitalize on the regional enthusiasm for collaborative working”.

As the database and the information contained within belongs to the beneficiary government, the approval of the exchange of information would need to be unanimous. The fact remains that increased transparency and an integrated regional approach to data management are essential to its success.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Currently, HALO in Bosnia and Herzegovina has marked and registered 95 percent of the military stockpile. The project is on track for completion by the end of 2020. However, there needs to be an understanding from stakeholders and implementing partners alike that the challenges of successfully maintaining these systems begins at the point of project completion. For all the effort that has gone into supporting the implementation of a highly workable system, the measure of success will be in its sustainability.

Where possible, HALO looked to similar projects in an effort to learn from their successes and challenges. The sharing of knowledge and practices across the SALW sub-sector of PSSM, for example, is not yet systematically practiced. In the Balkans, this is in part due to underdeveloped stakeholder relationships and a poor understanding of what different partners could achieve and at what cost. National and regional projects could therefore be targeted more effectively.

In pursuing a regional solution, there is a risk of implementers, whether they be non-governmental or inter-governmental entities, pursuing interventions that are too narrowly focused in scope to have any real impact or too shallow so as to merely pay lip-service to the tenets laid out in the Franco-German roadmap. In the AMRO project, HALO has identified a cost-effective and tangible solution, which has the potential to scale across the region.

CONCLUSION

A regional approach in the establishment of sustainable and gender-sensitive marking and registration programs is an essential component of an effective life-cycle management program necessary to achieve a successful, long-term solution to the problems associated with diverted and illicit SALW in the Western Balkans. Although each constituent nation will have its own requirements to which such a project can be tailored, the principles that have ensured the success of the AMRO project in Bosnia and Herzegovina can and should be applied to SALW interventions throughout the region. The sustainability of such projects rests on three factors: the political will to see them implemented to completion, funding, and the provision of continued support by capable implementers. With that in mind, the future holds opportunities as well as challenges. Donors are increasingly looking for tangible results and sharing systems be required. However, it is of the utmost importance to acknowledge potential shortcomings in their SALW management systems, the prevention of diversion and the upholding of a sustainable marking and registration system requires an understanding of the problem, the means to address it, and the willingness to be transparent.

See endnotes page 65

The HALO Trust would like to thank our donors who fund our work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are grateful to the German Federal Foreign Office, the United Kingdom and the Norwegian Ministries of Defense, and the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation (UNSCAR). HALO would also like to thank our partners in the AMRO, the Bosnian Ministry of Defense, and EUFOR for their support and coordinated efforts.

By Beamie-Moses Seiwoh, Aurelie Fabry, Grégoire de Nantes, and Edison Pineda [UNMAS DRC]

IMPROVING SECURITY IN THE DRC THROUGH WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION MANAGEMENT

Since its independence in 1960, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) has undergone significant political turmoil. The resurgence of armed conflict since 1996 has displaced thousands across the country and resulted in proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW), which remains a serious concern. The diversion of SALW and ammunition from state-owned stockpiles is linked to poor or insufficient weapons and ammunition management (WAM) capacity, practices, and procedures, and has been identified as a major cause of illicit arms and ammunition proliferation in the DRC. The trafficking, accumulation, and misuse of SALW and related ammunition pose a systemic and pervasive threat to peacebuilding and hampers long-term socioeconomic development. Installation of weapon storage solutions as well as the provision of WAM training, as implemented by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), is helping to improve the security situation in the DRC. Moreover, these activities support the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) mandate to establish a protective environment for civilians in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, it is in alignment with the National Action Plan for Control of SALW in the DRC 2018-2022 (NAP 18-22), implemented by the National Commission for the Control of SALW and Reduction of Armed Violence (CNC-ALPC).

In 2018, the Regional Centre on Small Arms in the Great Lakes Region aimed to establish the nexus between fragility situations and the illicit proliferation of SA/LW in the DRC, and examine how this correlation has impacted on livelihoods and human development. This assessment attributed the proliferation of SA/LW to the protracted armed conflict and violence that led to the formation of militia groups, weak border controls, and the porous of national and territorial borders. A study carried out in Eastern DRC in 2010 (where approximately 300,000 illicit firearms were in circulation at the time) by the Groupe de Recherche et d’Information sur la Paix et la sécurité (GRIP) concluded that SA/LW are key drivers and enablers of conflict. In a 2018 study, Small Arms Survey (SAS) estimated that 945,784 unregistered firearms were in circulation throughout DRC in 2017. These widespread problems contribute to an insecure environment (including food insecurity in the most rural areas) with an elevated rate of armed violence, displacement of populations as a result of internal conflicts, namely territorial conflicts (among pastoralist communities); and armed conflict in neighboring countries, creating significant challenges for the host communities’ populations and authorities.

In an effort to combat the threat of SALW proliferation, the DRC has committed to regional and international instruments such as the Kinshasa Convention, the Nairobi Protocol, the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PACK), and the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The DRC works with partners, including the MONUSCO and UNMAS, to strengthen its national SA/LW framework through WAM.