

landmine action week

ANTI-VEHICLE MINES

Anti-vehicle mines are designed to incapacitate or destroy vehicles and they contain a larger explosive charge than antipersonnel mines. They are commonly used on roads to prevent traffic.

Anti-vehicle mines kill and injure a large number of people every year and the fear of anti-vehicle mines stops people from using roads and leaves rural communities isolated:

- Humanitarian organisations cannot use roads where anti-vehicle mines may be present.
- Vulnerable populations in countries such as Afghanistan, Angola and Sudan get no clean water, health centres or food distribution because aid agencies cannot safely reach them.
- Aid agency workers are amongst the most common victims of anti-vehicle mines.

Earlier this year Landmine Action released a report identifying 56 countries affected by anti-vehicle mines. Over recent years the following humanitarian organisations have lost staff to anti-vehicle mines in their efforts to assist poor communities:

- International Committee of the Red Cross, World Food Programme, International Rescue Committee, Austrian Relief Programme, Norwegian People's Aid, The Halo Trust, Save the Children, CARITAS, CARE, Oxfam.

The number of people who have been denied clean water, health services and other assistance as a result of this contamination cannot be calculated:

- In 2003, the UN Mine Action Service reported that just 16 anti-vehicle mine accidents had affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance to 'almost 300,000' people in Angola. Angola experienced 41 accidents in the whole year.



Figure 1: Remains of an ambulance that struck an anti-vehicle mine in Afghanistan.

This November, the UK Government will continue to work within the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) to develop tighter controls over anti-vehicle mines. More than 40 countries have already backed proposals that acknowledge that tighter controls are needed. But the solutions these governments are proposing are completely inadequate.

The proposals on the table

Working within the CCW, the UK Government has supported proposals calling for:

- A minimum metal content equivalent to 8 grammes of iron for all anti-vehicle mines so they can be found with a metal detector.
- Outside of marked and recorded areas, countries only to use 'self-destructing' mines.

BUT

- 8 grammes of iron is far too little – only about the same as a 10 pence piece. Searching hundreds of kilometres of road for such a small amount of metal will take forever – especially where each metal reading has to be carefully investigated.
- Self-destructing mechanisms all have some failure rate - so dangerous mines are left behind. The people who test the failure-rates are usually the same people who make the mines.
- Marking and recording minefields is not normally the highest priority for armies on the brink of defeat. Where wars drag on for years the records are almost always lost anyway.

Talks about talks

Landmine Action has not previously called for a ban on anti-vehicle mines because we retained the hope that the CCW would show a genuine commitment toward developing effective controls over these weapons. After years of 'talks-about-talks' in the CCW the meetings coming up in November must either decide to draft new legislation on anti-vehicle mines or the CCW should end its deliberations in recognition that it does not represent a worthwhile forum. Even if the CCW does agree to draft new legislation it must then show a far greater commitment to controls that would afford real additional protection to the civilian population. If no effective controls can be agreed upon and the potential of these weapons to cause great humanitarian suffering is to remain, then states will have forfeited their right to retain these weapons and they should be made illegal.