

campaign

How far towards a mine free future?

Article 5 of the Ottawa Treaty

Each State Party is obliged to “destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than ten years after the entry into force of this Convention for that State Party”.

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Photo: Simon Conway/Landmine Action

Mine Free: Not Anytime Soon

By Richard Kidd

Director, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement
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Mine action is changing. This is not 1997 and what the international community has learned in the past seven years clearly indicates that the path forward is something different than a literal reading of the Ottawa Convention would suggest. The landmine impact survey process has demonstrated very clearly that only a small portion of the minefields, normally less than 20%, account for the vast majority of casualties and lost economic opportunities. The mine action community has a responsibility to profit from new knowledge and to adjust its approach accordingly.

The phrase “mine-free” is an inspiring statement of purpose, but a poor organizing principle given that no donor or collection of donors, no lending institution and no major impacted country has indicated a willingness to put up the huge amount of resources required to find and clear every last mine. With annual victim figures dropping towards 10,000 it is hard to make the case that landmines continue to be a global “scourge” in the order of other issues such as HIV/AIDS, food security, malaria etc. The initiative to “mainstream” mine action into development argues in favour of using “return on investment” as a criteria for mine clearance, and while this return is positive in many cases, it is not positive in (most) others. There is substantial evidence to suggest that many of the mines now being cleared are inert, degraded by the effects of time, temperature and moisture. Why risk

deminers’ lives to clear land that no one will use? Why spend money to clear land that will not generate economic returns and why remove mines that Mother Nature has already rendered safe? Attempting to clear every last mine would be, in a world of pressing demands and scarce resources, an unfortunate waste of funds, funds that could save more lives and be more beneficial if applied elsewhere.

This realisation should not be taken as a critique of any treaty or policy position, but rather as positive testimony to the power that knowledge can have in focusing scarce resources on activities where such resources will do the most good. Mine affected countries and the international community can work together to develop sound national strategic plans, plans that set forth achievable visions and match resources to prioritised and measurable outcomes. As the most pressing impacts of landmines are removed, collective efforts can shift away from large-scale clearance activities by outside organizations, allowing programs with greater national ownership to come to the fore. These smaller, more balanced, and more sustainable programs would focus on mine risk education, marking of suspected hazardous areas and limited clearance only in response to newly discovered threats or changes in land-use patterns. Such an approach would allow for the most rapid reduction of hazards and the lowest possible expenditure, surely a desirable outcome from any perspective.



Mechanical vegetation cutting.
Photo: The HALO Trust.

By Guy Willoughby

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It is over 16 years since I set up HALO in Afghanistan, and globally we now have over 6,000 deminers – clearing more mines, more hectares and using more equipment than any other demining agency. Perhaps this is why I have been invited to speak today and to speak on behalf of the “NGO Perspective”, a group of five mineclearance NGOs (DanChurchAid, Danish Demining Group, The HALO Trust, Handicap International and Norwegian People’s Aid). This month the international community and many mine affected countries are reviewing the mid-way point of a 10 year programme launched through the Ottawa Treaty to eradicate landmines – to create “mine free” states by 2009. In some cases this deadline is a couple or so years later. But I should not be here “at Nairobi”; in fact none of us should need to be here at all. By now we should all have finished mineclearance, or at least cleared the vast majority of mines that people or livestock may tread on.

But have we finished – no. And will we finish by 2009 – in most mine affected countries, probably not. It is thoroughly depressing that HALO will reach its 21st birthday in five years’ time and probably still be clearing large numbers of mines along with our NGO Perspective partners and other actors. It will not be a birthday to celebrate, more a recognition that some thing, some plan, somehow has gone terribly wrong and has resulted in the deaths and maiming of tens of thousands of mines victims out in the communities, who had been waiting for many years for the clearance teams to arrive and clear their fields and homesteads.

Were these communities living in false hope? Yes – they were. And in 1945 did Europeans, in Narvik, Naples, Normandy

Landmines and Sex

and Nijmegen, live in false hope that the landmines in their fields would be cleared? I have been researching history and talking to engineers, and I can tell you that the answer is No – because they were cleared – millions and millions of landmines were cleared, and they were cleared by 1950. One example – Dr Jean-Baptiste Richardier, Director at Handicap International in France was recently in Kosovo and accompanied Raymond Aubrac, a well known resistance figure during World War II. In 1945, Aubrac was tasked by General de Gaulle with the clearance of French soil to allow the quick resumption of desperately needed civilian activities. Despite the lack of understanding of the problem by German soldiers enrolled to do the job and supervising French soldiers alike, and despite the scarce technical resources available, the bulk of this immense task was actually completed within just a few years. In Kosovo Raymond Aubrac met Endrit, a young boy of 8 who lost his right leg in March 2004, less than 50 meters from his home. Commenting on this sad and appalling accident, Aubrac made an astonishing reflexion: “Perhaps the clearance of France was in fact so quickly implemented that the population didn’t have to endure the permanence of a threat like this one. If it had been more lasting and painful, my fellow citizens would better remember their ordeal and subsequently their support for mine clearance projects would be more forthcoming today...”

Indeed, how come these many millions were cleared in France and elsewhere Europe in five years, while it has taken ten years and more to clear far fewer numbers in post-conflict environments such as Croatia, Bosnia, Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia, Vietnam, and so on and so forth. OK, some countries have had mineclearance interrupted by short outbreaks of fighting such as in Afghanistan or northern Iraq, or longer, as in Chechnya. But the vast majority of mine action programmes have kept going. So why is the work not finished?

The answer is simple, I’m afraid to say. It boils down to a lack of determination to get the job done – and that means a lack of determination by most of the people who run “Mine Action”. Instead many of the

managers, whether they be UN, government and even non-government, seem content to encourage zillions of dollars being spent NOT on mineclearance, but on what comes out of international get-togethers in New York, Geneva, Oslo, Rome, Venice, Copenhagen, Madrid, Brussels, Johannesburg, Maputo, Ljubljana, London, Houston, Bangkok, Nairobi, Zagreb and many many more cities.

And what do the nodding heads agree at these meetings? More mineclearance to help the impoverished communities that are screaming out for it – not really, because otherwise we would have finished most clearance by now. The nodding heads simply promote yet more working groups, workshops, IT systems, symposia, strategies, studies, standards, plans, policies, portfolios, principled programming, processes, procedures, quality management, mainstreaming, methodologies, measurables, monitoring, quality control, consultations, consultants, courses, conferences, capacity building – and the full range of outreaches, outputs, inputs, indicators, impacts, intervention logic, linkages, gendering, thematic, logical frameworks, normative frameworks, blockages, goals and supergoals. Oh, of course, we accept that some of these are important, but Europe

was cleared with simple planning by experienced practitioners, followed by action. It was “the product, not the process” that was important. Mineclearance is not difficult – it has been described as a mix of gardening and archaeology – in fact not really much more difficult than digging up potatoes or cassava – just more dangerous and requiring strict but simple procedures.

So how has it got confused? If we can put the gravy train into a long siding for a moment, the confusion is probably because the senior managers think landmines must be treated like other humanitarian disasters and need a full blown “multi-faceted” response, like the responses for drought, flooding, hurricanes, locust or HIV AIDS. But these are all recurring – mines are not. The lucky thing is that MINES DON’T HAVE SEX. Once cleared, mines are gone, finito, terminado, khallas.

So please, everybody, let’s get the problem solved now. Let’s deliver a tangible product and not a theoretical process. Let’s replace false hope with real hope. Put over 90 per cent of your efforts and funds into actual clearance, and divide the remainder into the supporting elements of survey, mapping, training, planning and audit, so that when we gather in five years time we will be able to celebrate a job well done.



Manual demining. Photo: The HALO Trust.

Soria Moria, 24 March 2004

1. **On 22-24 March 2004, a group of mine action NGOs (DanChurchAid, Danish Demining Group, The HALO Trust, Handicap International (France), Norwegian People's Aid and Mines Advisory Group*) and representatives from the UN (United Nations Mine Action Services Mine Action Service, United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Office for Project Services) met in Oslo to discuss and agree on best practises for improving cooperation and effectiveness in the conduct of mine action. The Group recognised that it did not represent the full spectrum of mine action stakeholders, however it brought together experienced practitioners from the NGO and UN communities particularly focusing on mine clearance operations. Four areas of concern were raised and discussed: coordination, personnel, costs and IMAS. The conclusions of the meeting are contained in the minutes below. It was agreed that the document and achievements stemming from this meeting should be reviewed in twelve months time.**

COORDINATION

2. The Group agreed that coordination is important and indeed a necessity, and is best achieved when simple manageable solutions are found in cooperation between national and local government structures, operators, affected communities and other development actors. Coordination between UN and NGOs requires participation and cooperation by both to be fully effective. Consequently the Group agreed on the following:
 3. All stakeholders including mine action operators should fully participate in the development of a realistic and achievable national mine action plan under the lead ministry of the host government.
 - a) In situations where national authorities are responsible for the mine action program, the UN will recommend to national authorities that NGOs be represented on national mine action steering committees or their equivalent.
 - b) In situations where UNMAS is responsible for the mine action program, it will usually establish an interim oversight body until such time as the national authorities assume this responsibility. In these circumstances UNMAS will recommend to the senior UN official that the mine action steering committee include representatives of NGOs.
 4. The UN and NGOs agree that mine action plans and activities should be developed in light of, and with a view to, integration into other humanitarian, peace building and development plans.
 5. Task selection, prioritisation and planning often are best undertaken locally in mine-affected communities, and in conjunction with district authorities, provincial governments and other development and mine action actors. (In addition to formal planning processes the NGOs present recommended that operators should coordinate their work plans on a provincial level on a quarterly basis). This process should be broad enough to secure national infrastructure priorities and other macro priorities, and contribute to the development of a national plan.
 6. In situations where the UNMAS is responsible for managing the mine action programmes and the UN MACC has responsibility for both coordination and supervision of contracts, particular vigilance is required to avoid any confusion of roles or potential conflict of interest.
 7. If any significant differences arise at field level that cannot be resolved locally, the UN and NGOs will make direct contact at headquarters level to discuss and resolve the issue on an urgent basis.
 8. The UN and NGOs will instruct their staff through letters on coordination requirements to facilitate better cooperation in the field.
 9. The NGOs present committed to attend the meeting that will be convened by the UN with the purpose to fully understand the mine action portfolio objectives as well as to review thoroughly the whole process. A decision to further participate in the portfolio will be made by each NGO.
10. The Group agreed that IMSMA is not working as intended in many countries and welcomed the decision of GICHD to undertake a redesign of the existing IMSMA. The Group recommends that the GICHD ensure full consultation with all field based mine action stakeholders, thereby ensuring that an operationally focused system is produced capable of being tailored to local needs and capacities in the field.
 11. The Group recognised the importance of accurate, timely and disciplined data entry, management and dissemination. Once entered and validated all such information should be freely available, updated and disseminated without delay. Where a functional national IMSMA system is yet to be established, mine/UXO clearance organisations may be requested to fulfil the initial data entry and management role.

COSTS

12. The Group agreed that multi-year funding to mine action programmes greatly contributes to efficiency and cost effectiveness by providing the best return on training and initial capital investments. The Group further agreed to bring this point to the urgent attention of both bilateral and multilateral donors.
13. The Group agreed that in most situations donor funding for well established mine action NGO operators is preferably channelled directly. However, the Group understands that some donor and national government mechanisms require funds destined for NGOs to be channelled through national or UN system. The Group also understands that there are situations, including for example the Rapid Response Plan, for which the UN will continue to request funds destined for operators through the VTF and other UN mechanisms. UNMAS committed itself to take steps to improve the speed of processing of such funds passing through the VTF. The NGOs committed themselves to providing timely reports on contributions received.

14. The Group agreed that studies related to mine action operations should focus particularly on issues identified by mine action centres and operators as being fundamental to the design and management of field operations. Furthermore, they should be designed and implemented in close consultation with experienced field practitioners in order to ensure applicability and cost effectiveness. Group members committed themselves to participate in the review of future research proposals.
15. The Group welcomes the UNDP initiative to review arrangements for implementation of its current management-training programme and its commitment to seek more input from field practitioners. NGOs were encouraged to provide input to course content and design and to nominate appropriate national personnel from their own organisation to take advantage of such courses.
16. The Group raised concerns in regards to the timing, content and appropriateness of Strategic Planning initiatives in relationship to Landmine Impact Surveys. The Group recommended that these questions should be taken up by governments and MACCs, and also in the Survey Working Group.
17. The UN agrees that the number of international staff within MACCs should be limited to those essential to the achievement of the MACCs defined roles and functions and that the transfer of responsibility to national staff at the earliest possible opportunity will always be a prime objective.

PERSONNEL

18. The Group agreed that recruitment should be conducted on an open basis, based on merit and in relation to the requirements of the position. Field experience in humanitarian and development work should also be recognised as an asset for certain positions. The UN welcomes NGO input on its Terms of Reference for key mine action positions and will circulate them for comments as part of its periodic review.
19. The Group agreed that in-kind contributions of military personnel can play a valuable role in certain situations, such as military liaison officers and in self-contained technical positions, provided that their selection is managed as for other recruitment, by considering

- multiple candidates and assessing their experience against requirements. In general, short-term assignments should be avoided.
20. The Group agreed that training requires exposure to the realities at all levels. The in-country orientation of newly deployed UN staff should include full familiarisation with the practice of all operators, and NGO staff orientation also should include exposure to MACC and related programmes. The UN welcomes the NGO offer to provide training support for UN personnel.
21. The Group agreed on the utility of training national and international staff in advance of anticipated deployment and that donor funding for training would be a worthwhile investment to increase quality and efficiency. Donors will be encouraged to provide funding for training and field orientation to support the practical training of mine action staff to be carried out in existing UN and NGO mine action programmes.
22. The Group agreed that training for Quality Assurance staff warrants special attention given its importance in handover of cleared land and its potential to generate friction. Training should ensure that QA staff are fully familiar with the operating procedures of the agencies they observe and that the overall QA approach supports the timely handover of land to the community. The UN will develop recommended best practices and appropriate training and materials for all external QA staff – international and national. As a first step, the NGOs and UN will provide examples of countries where they consider the QA approach to have been positive. The UN will convene a working group to review the materials and produce recommended best practices and a possible training course that could be used for regional or local training. Training could also include, for example, orientation in a country that has been identified as an example of good practice.

IMAS

23. The Group agreed that IMAS should be reviewed to incorporate lessons learnt and should be simplified where appropriate. Furthermore, The Group confirmed that the distinction between “essential safety practices” and “best practice” in IMAS should be defined by the use of the words “shall” and “should”. In practice,

application at the country level of the distinction has not always been optimal and the Group agreed that the following steps would improve the situation:

24. The UN recognises that the system for reviewing IMAS needs to be more proactive in seeking comments from operators and national authorities, and appropriate measures will be taken to address this. Provisions already exist to permit proposals for amendments to any IMAS, independent of the Review Board meetings and the issuance of new editions, for reasons of operational safety or efficiency. This will require distributing materials, announcements, etc. to a much wider audience than has been the practice thus far.
25. The Group agreed that sufficient resources and staff time need to be invested in the development, review and rationalisation of national standards, as well as of IMAS itself, to reflect the distinction between essential safety requirements and the promotion of best practices.
26. A guide for the development of national standards is being drafted by the GICHD for the UN. The UN will request the GICHD to seek comments from the NGOs.
27. The UN will advise CTAs and Programme Managers of best practices for the drafting and application of national standards based on IMAS. This will include advice on the inclusion of all operators, the opportunity to adapt language in IMAS to local circumstances, recommended frequency of reviews, and resources available to support their efforts.
28. Organisations requesting changes to IMAS should be invited to take part in IMAS Review Board meetings to ensure that their concerns and comments are appropriately represented.
29. Based on consultation with mine action stakeholders, the Review Board will carry out a review of essential IMAS in 2004, having agreed the IMAS chapters for review by the end of April. When this has been completed, an amendments page will be attached to each IMAS indicating the modifications made.

* The first five NGOs constitute the NGO Perspective.

Very useful studies

The following email was circulated amongst the NGO community on 1st April 2004. The culprit still has not been identified:

“For all on action list,

In January and once again last month we sent out an update of studies which we have been contracted to undertake here in the University of Lucerne, but have had little response to our questionnaires. We do of course appreciate that our Mine Action Partners are busy in the field – as, oui, we all are – however we would appreciate une vite response as GICHD need to see our final draft this week before we go to print.

We are still waiting for responses covering:

The Gender Study – particularly returns on new SOPs to cover calibrating detectors when the wearing of jewellery is considered a cultural necessity.

The PPE Study – The use of helmets for Sikh deminers in Kashmir is the new issue and we need your feedback.

The Map Marking Study – sub contracted from Kansas, some agencies have told us that they do not use symbols for mines as they have not found any yet. OK, so why not do a symbol for perceived or pretend mines – as we all know, perception is as important as realite.

The Manual Study – There is confusion here – some of you are responding about writing manuals, others about manual mineclearance. Please go back to the original TOR and you will see this is not about the new IMAS Guide on how to understand IMAS 1-1 The Guide to IMAS. Manuals are important, otherwise detectors will not be calibrated correctly – Read the Manual, help the study!

The Mechanical Study – no returns yet received from the field on commercial machines yet to be deployed to the field. These machines are incredibly expensive and we need your feedback, otherwise donors will pay for them and they will not clear any mines and just break down and need many expensive expatriates to fux them. Please send your feedback – GICHD have a whole gloosy book on machines that have never made it to a minefield – use it, its a great book.

The IMSMA Rewrite Study – some of you have misunderstood. Until this study is

complete in late 2005 you must keep running IMSMA on Windows 95 and do NOT delete all your files. If you have already done so (and it seems many of you have), please contact GICHD for friendly advice on Recovery Software.

The Alternative Technology Study – We too work in the field, and please accept there has been huge progress with Bees, Rats, Pigs so do take seriously our questions on the alternative technology. Please stop pretending that most mines are found by manual deminers using hand tools to excavate safely around mines and destroying them. This is a fallacy spread around by certain field partners trying to justify their future employment.

The Odour Detection Study – there are serious considerations over the effect of vehicle exhaust fumes when dogs are trying to clear mines from roads, and farmyard excrement and use of human waste on agricultural land. We really need this study completed – it will be your fault if dogs miss anti-tank mines on roads when you have not helped the study. Remember, there is no such thing as a bad dog – it’s the human interpretation of the dogs that cause mishaps.

The Village Demining Study – only one NGO has bothered to respond to this important study. They asked questions about lack of casuality evacuation vehicles, supervision, servicing of equipment etc. When you respond this afternoon please don’t add these “oh so clever” comments. We have a big donor determined to make the concept work and we don’t want to have to include negative comments and concerns that show the whole concept to be flawed.

The Cost Effectiveness Study – please ask your staff to empty their pockets of loose change before they go to work – we believe we can collect thousands of Swiss Francs in this way – they will go towards ensuring GICHD retain its critical, central role in the world of mine action. REMEMBER – without GICHD, you the implementers are rudderless. Also, the loose change will affect detector calibration – so take it out, now.

Socio-Economic Impact Study (2) – Some of you have failed to fill in the 2 boxes called “Economic Value of Life” in any currency but we prefer Euro, though

dollar will do and we will convert. You must put a value on life and stop avoiding the issue – we are not being so naïve to ask you to value an Afghan against and Albanian – just tell us your common global index for the value of a person (Male/Female please). Unless you value life, demining teams will spend for ever clearing perceived mined areas on paddy fields and never get round to clearing mines on forest tracks – so the population will continue to blow themselves up fetching fire wood to cook the rice from the fields you kindly cleared the previous year.

Deming Accident Study – Please check “Other” causes of injury while “on Duty”. We have had “lightening strike, heart attack, snake bite, rocket attack, truck crash, fainting on top of mine, playing with mine, urinating in minefield, suicide, following a demining dog, intercourse in minefield/ceoptus interruptus, slipped in minefield, praying – these are OK, but we think that some of you may be “taking the urine” (if that is correct English term – excuse my franglais) by suggesting some of your staff have been eaten by crocodiles or died of boredom. Come on – we need this study. Without Lessons Learnt we are back in the caves or up the trees.

Study on IMAS – see above on the guide to the guide. There seems to be confusion in your other responses. We understand the difference between Shall and Should, so you should too and shall show your staff. Some of you have said that “Shall” is only used in first person singular and first person plural – I shall and we shall – but IMAS means “You Shall”, which can, yes, be wrong and should be “You Will” – so to avoid further discussion we shall change all or most shalls to “Wills”. Unless, of course you the implementer would prefer the use of “Must”, which some of you say is bossy. So lets settle for “Will”, as in Willing, Show Will – a voluntary and enthusiastic response – not “Will” as in Bewildered, at a loss – please. With IMAS based on ISO, then I should recommend the correct original 2nd person single and plural for should too – which, honestly, is “Shouldest”. I understand your bewilderment at this point – and IMAS is a guideline not a standard – but you shouldest try to make it work – it was a good idea at the time and you all nodded you heads and the donors nodded too.

Merci,
Isabella Satireau
Head of Research, Study on Studies”

A new approach based on an old approach

By Simon Conway

Deputy Director
Landmine Action

In July 1945 the German Engineer “Draeger” Brigade consisting of 104 officers and 3,244 men cleared 247 square kilometres of coast and 40 square kilometres between Nijmegen and Arnhem. It took them eight months. They cleared 1,079,857 mines. We have seen nothing like it since.

Instead we have a voracious bureaucracy called “coordination” that swallows up an increasing proportion of the available funding, and yet exists in the absence of oversight, transparency or accountability. Instead we have impossible “five year plans” based on the results of inaccurate “snap-shot” surveys. Instead we have incessant gimmickry: undeliverable promises are made on behalf of rats, cress and bees. Instead we have capacity building that never delivers a capacity. And instead we have a select coterie of overpaid technical advisors with a vested interest in perpetuating the problem.

We have a model for clearance that is based on a centralised authority handing out contracts and dictating task selection. It is a model that utterly ignores the participatory approach to working with beneficiary communities that has been in use by the rest of the development community for decades.

We are now are faced with a stark choice, either we continue as we are doing, conducting inefficient and expensive clearance operations or we can take a new approach.

An approach based upon the recognition that the mine problem is a finite one that can be swiftly solved if the right resources are made available and are correctly and efficiently targeted. Unlike drought and most diseases, mines do not cyclically recur –

once cleared they are gone. And we have an example, in the clearance of Europe after the Second World War that should be used as a model for future clearance operations. Large numbers of people were mobilized, with a minimum of cumbersome bureaucratic or coordination mechanisms, and cleared 94 million mines between 1945 and 1947 – that’s 85% of the estimated total. It was undertaken as part of a demobilisation process.

Don’t imagine that the mines were any different, in fact most of the Soviet manufactured mines that we are digging up today are direct copies of German mines: the stockmine, schrapnellmine and schutzenmine. They even had their own minimum metal mines made of glass: the glasmine

Could we replicate the post-war model? The resources are there: the one thing that most mine affected countries are rich in is manpower and in many post-conflict countries managed demobilisation is going to be a necessity if they are to avoid a slide into chaos. This is not an argument advocating the use of prisoners of war to clear mines, that would be illegal and immoral, but it is advocating clearance on a huge scale as part of a managed DDR process.

And the argument against? The “Draeger” Brigade suffered 179 fatalities and 384 injuries (a 17% casualty rate – high by anyone’s measure). But surely it is here, in the field of lightweight body armour and in the improved implementation of operations – one-man-one-lane, ground compensating detectors, internal quality control procedures – that we have come on leaps and bounds. You have only to examine the extremely low casualty rates amongst the international NGOs who employ thousands of staff around the world to recognise that there has been a huge leap in deminer safety.

Who can do it? Here providing the

answer is more difficult. Relying on the military to manage their own demobilisation process is an act of faith that would not be universally welcomed by mine affected communities. UNDP, UNOPS and UNMAS have a poor record in managing manpower. Some of the NGOs have done better: Cambodia is a good example with clearance currently costing between \$0.5 and \$1.5 a square metre. It is somewhere that a DDR process that handed thousands of new recruits over to the NGOs could yield spectacular results and bring the cost per square meter further down. But the NGOs may feel that a too close association with the military compromises their charitable status (certainly their management capacity would creak). ILO is another option and one that should be examined further.

What is certain is that if we are to afford the demobilisation of tens of thousands of former combatants into demining teams we will need to hold salary levels down. In this national authorities will have to show leadership. The issue of insurance will have to be confronted: an international not-for-profit insurance organisation should be set up for all demining agencies so that we can avoid excessive broker’s fees. Certain countries will need to come forward and gift trucks, body armour and detectors. It’s a challenge, but it is also possible – it has been done before.

Much has been achieved in the last five years, many mines have been cleared and casualty rates have fallen dramatically, but if we are to take serious steps towards a mine free future, even an impact free future, we need to change the way we look at this thing called mine action. We need to stop regarding it as a “black art” performed by “technical experts” and see it for what it is, a manpower issue. The more manpower applied the more area cleared, the more lives saved.

ERW and MOTAPM Global Impact Survey: Preliminary findings

By Richard Moyes

Project Co-ordinator, Landmine Action

During 2004 Landmine Action, Mines Action Canada and Actiongroup Landmine.de have been undertaking a Global Survey on the nature and impact of explosive remnants of war (ERW) and mines other than anti-personnel mines (MOTAPM). We have gathered information on 91 countries and disputed territories. The final report will be published at the beginning of 2005. However, we take this opportunity to highlight some of the preliminary findings of this project.

ERW

The survey finds ERW contamination to be widespread and persistent in the wake of conflict. In the immediate aftermath of conflict levels of ordnance contamination may be acute. Even after extensive clearance operations, ERW can present a persistent background threat. For example:

- In Kosovo, from the beginning of 2001 to August 2004, over 80% of mine and ERW-related casualties were a result of incidents involving ERW as opposed to mines.
- In the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus together hundreds of thousands of items of ordnance are recovered and destroyed annually by state institutions.

Whilst incidents involving ERW are caused by people accidentally striking ordnance during farming, or building fires on ground where ordnance is buried, a large number of accidents occur because people deliberately interact with ordnance. It should not be assumed that deliberate contact with ordnance is foolish or ignorant.

The most common reasons for handling ordnance (in certain environments) are:

- To make it possible to farm land
- To stop children from finding items and having accidents
- To salvage scrap metal as an economic resource.

A high proportion of casualties are men (70-80% in many environments).



A scrap metal yard in Cambodia.
Photo: Richard Boulter/The HALO Trust.

In many countries it is noted that children make up a significant proportion of victims. Research in south-east Asia has emphasised the role of children in the scrap metal trade. Indeed, the scrap metal trade is a major industry in post-conflict societies. Internationally, salvaging metal is one of the most commonly reported motivations for people seeking out or engaging with ordnance.

When ordnance is present within villages and communities, then people may engage with it either accidentally or deliberately so as to farm their land, to protect their children, or out of economic motivation. Ordnance contamination may not block the use of resources in the same way as anti-personnel mines – but working around ordnance contamination will often involve deliberate contact with ordnance, thus increasing the risk of accidents.

We note particular problems with respect to cluster munitions. Cluster munitions are not so widespread as some other forms of ERW because they have been used in fewer conflicts. However, in addition to problems with cluster munitions at the time of use, we note particular problems with their post-conflict impact. These problems result not only because of the failure rate of individual munitions, but because clusters of failed munitions create dense ERW contamination, which is more problematic for local communities to work around.

Other notable issues regarding ERW are:

- Poorly marked, sporadically used or abandoned firing ranges constitute

another particular part of the threat. This was reported in a high number of countries.

- Poorly managed ordnance stores have resulted in catastrophic accidents.
- We also note that poorly managed explosive stores and abandoned ordnance can be appropriated for use in Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). The use of ERW and MOTAPM in IEDs was noted in a significant number of countries.

MOTAPM

The report identifies 56 countries or disputed territories that contain some level of MOTAPM contamination. The nature of this contamination varies from low-impact, long-standing historical problems through to severe-impact contamination in areas such as Afghanistan, Angola, DR Congo, Eritrea-Ethiopia and Sudan. Impact is particularly severe where it denies access to vulnerable populations. Where MOTAPM contamination on routes denies humanitarian access it means that already vulnerable populations are denied assistance that would provide safe water, alleviate food insecurity and provide basic health. These populations are left still more vulnerable and the process of post-conflict recovery is delayed.

The most severe problems result from widespread use of MOTAPM by both Non-State Actors (NSAs) and government forces. Where the locations of these items have not been recorded, or where records are lost, and where there are no inherent mechanisms within the mines to limit their life MOTAPM can have a very severe humanitarian impact.

Very few countries that have MOTAPM contamination as a result of conflict have inherited detailed and comprehensive maps and records of MOTAPM use. In part, this emphasises the need for an extension and implementation of Amended Protocol II. Furthermore there is little evidence that record keeping during combat can provide a reliable basis for the protection of civilians. Additional restrictions and controls over MOTAPM are required.

The full findings of this project will be published early in 2005. For more information please contact Landmine Action at info@landmineaction.org