

# SCIAF factsheets

## landmines...

### What are landmines?

Deadly weapons buried in the ground or scattered from helicopters or aeroplanes during war. They fall into two main categories:

High-explosive anti-tank mines designed to destroy tanks and other large vehicles when triggered by the pressure of a heavy load. These are sometimes booby-trapped with smaller mines.

Smaller anti-personnel mines (APMs) designed to kill or maim. These mines are usually triggered by a trip-wire, by someone treading on a pressure switch or picking them up.

### Types of APMs:

**Blast mines, fragmentation mines, directional mines and bounding mines.** They range from low-cost plastic mines (about £2.00 each) that are difficult to detect, to "smart" mines which are designed to self-destruct after a fixed time.

**Butterfly mine PFM 1:** A hand-sized mine nicknamed the "butterfly mine" because of its winged shape, which allows it to float to the ground from an aeroplane without exploding. When the mine is picked up, the liquid explosive in it can easily blow off a child's arm.

**Valmara 69:** This "bounding" mine leaps 45 centimetres into the air before shattering into more than 1,000 metal splinters. Anyone standing within 25 metres is likely to be killed, and anyone within 100m will be injured.

**POMZ-2:** This fragmentation mine looks like a hand grenade on a wooden spike, it detonates by tripwire.

**PMN "Black Widow":** This blast mine contains 240 grammes of TNT. It will severely injure or kill.

**Self-destruct or "smart" mines:** Designed with a mechanism that self-destructs (explodes) or neutralises itself after a fixed time. The Red Cross claims there is a 10% failure rate and it can take years for these mines to become inactive.

### Where are landmines made?

Forty-five countries have been involved in the past in producing and exporting landmines, including Italy, USA, former Soviet Union, Sweden, Germany, Austria, France, China, Britain, Portugal, Spain, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan and former Yugoslavia. The majority of these countries, including Britain, have now signed a treaty (see below) which means they are no longer allowed to produce mines.

### Where are they used?

Over 100 million are laid in more than 60 countries including Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Iraq, Mozambique, Somalia, and former Yugoslavia. Africa has 18-30 million mines scattered in 18 countries. There are between 9 and 10 million uncleared mines in Afghanistan. Cambodia has 4 million mines and 30,000 amputees - that's one person in every 236. More recently, millions of mines have been deployed in the Balkans.

### What effects do they have?

Every 15 minutes someone is injured and 800 people per month are killed by mines. This is a conservative estimate, and only includes those who reach a hospital, where the death will be recorded.

### Who is at risk from landmines?

Anyone in a mined area. You cannot always spot APMs just by looking carefully over an area because they are usually buried or hidden in undergrowth.

### For example:

One of the obstacles to refugees returning home after war is their fear of landmines, and the fact that mined land cannot be farmed until it is cleared.

Collecting firewood, planting or harvesting crops, and collecting water all become high-risk and potentially fatal activities in a country littered with landmines.

Children may not be alert to the dangers of landmines as they play around their villages or walk to school. Sometimes you can walk along the same path many times not knowing there is a landmine there until you

actually tread on it.

Even when farmland seems to be cleared, it is still possible for small mines to be carried from place to place by flood water.

#### **What progress has been made towards a worldwide ban?**

The UN Inhumane Weapons Convention and its Landmines Protocol of 1981 prohibits the indiscriminate use of mines. However, this agreement did not cover the production, transfer or export of mines.

The UN General Assembly called for a 3-5 year moratorium (temporary ban) on landmine exports in November 1993. Britain voted in favour, but it did not include "self-destruct" mines.

Two international conferences - September/October 1995 in Vienna and May 1996 in Geneva further restricted the use of mines.

A further conference took place in Ottawa, Canada in December 1997. The treaty from this conference is known as the Mine Ban treaty or Ottawa Convention, and was signed by 130 countries.

The treaty could not come into force until 40 had ratified it (made it law in their own country). Britain completed ratification, rushing legislation through Parliament, on 31 July 1998.

#### **Success**

Burkina Faso became the fortieth country to ratify the Mine Ban Treaty in September 1998, paving the way for it to become international law in March 1999.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which Tun Channareth from Cambodia collected. He is a campaigner who lost both legs in a landmine explosion.

#### **What next?**

There is still campaigning work to do. Russia, China and the United States are among countries that have not signed the Convention. Arms manufacturers are beginning to devise alternatives to anti-personnel mines, and there remains the huge task of de-mining, which is extremely dangerous and expensive. The war in the Balkans (1999) has seen the use of cluster bombs which are very similar to landmines, dropped from the air.

#### **Why is SCIAF in favour of a worldwide ban on anti-personnel landmines?**

Landmines are an indiscriminate weapon. They have been called "soldiers that never sleep." They can lie in the ground undetected for years after a conflict and kill people who have had nothing to do with the war. They hinder the planting and harvesting of crops, the return of refugees to their homes, and the use of essential roads, bridges and schools in mined areas. This all makes the return to normal life after a war much more difficult and holds back development for years. The cost of demining uses up scarce resources which could otherwise be used, for example, for rebuilding, tools or seeds.

#### **links**



[Mines Advisory Group](#) provides a voice for the thousands upon thousands of people who suffer directly or indirectly from landmines. Click to find out how they

- work with conflict-affected populations to identify needs
- clear land of mines
- help people to live more safely in a mine-contaminated environment, and
- advocate for the effective use of funds to provide the greatest benefit to mine-affected communities.

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