

LANDMINES RECOGNISE NO CEASE-FIRE

Since their development at the end of the First World War, landmines have been responsible for countless deaths and injuries. Their indiscriminate nature poses an equal threat to soldiers and civilians alike, with thousands of people around the world still living with the threat of devices placed there decades before.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT EACH DAY OVER 70 PEOPLE ARE KILLED OR INJURED BY ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

The damage inflicted by landmines goes however far beyond what it claims in lives. Landmines can imprison and threaten entire communities and are as such frequently used against minority populations, many of whom are UNPO Members. Information gathered from the extensive Landmine Monitoring Project suggests that the following UNPO Members live in some of the worst affected regions in the world:

SOMALILAND, ABKHAZIA, CHECHNYA, AND KOSOVA

Landmines do not just maim and kill. They become an environmental problem when large tracts of agricultural land are mined, threatening the sustainability of entire communities. Much of the population in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, are forced to face the threat of landmines when engaging in essential activities such as farming, gathering firewood, and fetching water. Landmines are therefore still used to drive indigenous or minority communities from their land and to break up their communities, most notably in Burma, where the continued use of landmines frequently draws international condemnation.

Landmines also impede transport and act as obstacles to those wishing to access medical facilities, schools, and urban population centres. Repairs to infrastructure, supplies, and aid, are also prevented from reaching those in dire need, yet states continue to stockpile mines.

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 54 COUNTRIES STILL HAVE STORES, COMPRISING 180 MILLION ANTIPERSONNEL MINES

For communities already living in poverty and insecurity, the impact of landmines is not simply physical, it is also psychological. Children are robbed of the right to safely play outside; their parents have their peace of mind eroded in the constant knowledge of the threat that their children face.

The Karenni people, along with other UNPO Members in Burma, suffer extensively from the threat of landmines. Some evidence suggests their communities suffer at least one landmine victim per day, and hilling reports indicate that Burmese officials have used Karenni villagers as human minesweepers - revenge for uprisings lead by local ethnic groups. Even those choosing to flee the regime have become victims, as escape routes are heavily mined.

Many UNPO Members know first-hand the threat of landmines and so have engaged themselves actively in the campaign to ban their use.

UNPO STRONGLY SUPPORTS THIS CAMPAIGN, AND WORKS TO HIGHLIGHT THE DEVASTATING AND INDISCRIMINATE EFFECTS LANDMINES HAVE ON ENTIRE COMMUNITIES, AN AWARENESS THAT OUGHT SURELY TO BRING THE USE OF LANDMINES TO AN END ONCE AND FOR ALL

