

Children & Landmines



*A boy after an ICRC mine awareness presentation outside of Sarajevo, Bosnia, an area where a number of mine/UXO accidents involving children have occurred.
Photographer: Angela Giles (Youth Ambassador 2002-03)*

A Resource Prepared for the Youth Mine Action Ambassador Program/ Programme des jeunes ambassadeurs pour l'action contre les mines

Children & Landmines: Fact Sheet

In the last decade, wars have left 2 million children dead, 6 million disabled and 12 million homeless (CIDA Children and War Fact Sheet, 2003). Countless children have been psychologically scarred. In 2003, at least 23% of mine victims are children or youth (Landmine Monitor Report 2003). Children living in mine-affected areas are denied their most basic rights: the right to survival, to education, to adequate nutrition, to health care, *and to a childhood.*

How Are Children Affected?

- Children are innately curious and tend to pick up strange objects. The interesting shapes and colours of anti-personnel mines, particularly PFM-1 'butterfly' mines, tend to entice children. Children too young to read may not heed warning signs.
- In some communities where mines have become familiar everyday objects, children make toys out of mines. In Kurdistan, it is reported that children have used anti-personnel mines as toy truck wheels with a nail driven through them to form an axle (UNICEF).
- Economic activities expose children to the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). In certain countries children are responsible for herding cattle, cultivating fields or gathering firewood, activities which put them at risk of entering mine-infested areas. Children often work as scavengers and gather mines and ERW to sell as scrap metal.
- Child soldiers are sometimes forced to lay mines or march in front of troops to act as human mine detonators (International Coalition to Ban Child Soldiers).
- Due to their small size and the close proximity of their vital organs to the blast, children are more likely to be killed by mines than adults. Even an explosion of the smallest mine can be lethal.
- Children who survive mine injuries face severe medical problems. Treatment and rehabilitation is costly and many families cannot afford medical expenses. Few survivors receive prostheses that keep up with continued growth of their bones. Children require a new prosthetic as often as every six months.
- Child mine survivors are often prevented from returning to school or are hesitant to socialize with their peers for fear that they will be teased and ostracized.
- It is important that the children traumatized by war be offered an everyday life as close as possible to their life before the war. However, the presence of mines prevent the normalization of life in post-conflict communities. Access to schools, clinics, water sources, and safe play areas are jeopardized by the presence of mines.

In Afghanistan, at least 50% of mine casualties are children and youth under the age of 18.
-Landmine Monitor
Report 2003

- Children and their families are often forcibly displaced from their homes by the presence of landmines, resulting in long-lasting psychological trauma.
- Even when children themselves are not primary victims, landmines have a significant impact on their lives. The death or injury of a parent or sibling often forces children to withdraw from school to work and contribute to their family's income.

Children Need to Be Protected!

- Adopted in 1989, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* provides a comprehensive framework for actions to secure children's rights and well-being. The Convention entitles children to receive the necessary protection against the dangers and effects of landmines. According to Article 6(2), "States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child".
- Many mine accidents can be prevented with education. Through children's theatre, comic books and school activities, many school districts and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in mine-affected areas have adopted innovative ways to teach children about the dangers of landmines. The challenge is to deliver the right message without arousing children's curiosity to the extent that they will go searching for mines.
- Teaching mine awareness to children is also an effective way to reach adults, particularly their parents, as they will talk at home about what they learned.
- Organizations such as UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are working to provide safe areas for children and youth to play. In Afghanistan, Chechnya and the Palestinian territories, the ICRC has built safe playgrounds in mine-affected communities.
- Universalization of the Ottawa Convention as well as increased resources for mine clearance and survivor assistance is crucial to protect children from the dangers of anti-personnel mines and to assist child survivors with rebuilding their lives.

"For children who survive mine accidents, the physical injuries are usually far greater, the emotional trauma much deeper, and the economic prospects significantly bleaker than for an adult victim."

-War Child

Sources:

Children & Armed Conflict Working Group, Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee
CIDA: "Children and War: What You Should Know" (fact sheet).

Government of Canada: www.waraffectedchildren.gc.ca

International Coalition to Ban Child Soldiers: www.child-soldiers.org

International Committee of the Red Cross: www.icrc.org

Landmine Monitor Report 2003, International Campaign to Ban Landmines

Machel Report from the International Conference on War-Affected Children, Winnipeg, September 2000.

UNICEF: www.unicef.org

War Child: www.warchild.org