

3 April 2008



## Press Conference

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

### **PRESS CONFERENCE BY DEPUTY EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR ON GLOBAL COMMEMORATION**

#### **OF INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION**

While the number of people killed by anti-personnel landmines had dropped to an all-time low this year, there was a need for continued vigilance as a closer look at the statistics revealed that nearly half a million people injured by the deadly devices worldwide may require life-long medical care, a senior United Nations humanitarian official said today.

Catherine Bragg, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, said at a Headquarters press conference that the number of landmine deaths had dropped to 6,000 in 2007 from a high of some 26,000 in 1997, the year in which the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Landmine Treaty entered into force.

Speaking ahead of tomorrow's commemoration of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, she asked: "So why continue to draw attention to [the issue]?" noting that globally, the number of people who had survived accidents with explosive remnants of war continued to rise. "Today, we have an estimated 473,000 people who may need life-long medical care and rehabilitation services. That's half a million people; not a small number."

Moreover, she continued, the international non-governmental organization Landmine Survivor's Network estimated that, for each survivor, there were perhaps four or five ancillary victims, for example, members of families whose breadwinners might have lost limbs or eyesight. "So if you do the math, this adds up to close to 2 million victims of landmines and many of them are in need of support that empowers them to be self-sufficient and active members of their communities."

Stressing that the United Nations Mine Action network of affiliated agencies wished to see the number of casualties "reduced to zero" as soon as possible, she said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's statement marking the International Day called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify all disarmament, humanitarian and human rights law instruments relating to landmines, explosive remnants of war and "survivors of the devastating effects of these devices".

Responding to questions, Ms. Bragg, who was joined at the briefing by Justin Brady, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), said the significant drop in the number of new deaths was due largely to stepped-up demining activities, mine-risk education and victim-assistance programmes.

"It is clear that it's not just about taking these weapons out of the ground," she said, adding that United Nations mine action teams worked in-country with national authorities and non-governmental organizations to reduce the humanitarian and socio-economic threats posed by landmines and explosive remnants of war. "The overall goal is to put ourselves out of business by equipping national authorities with the technical and human resources they need to address the problems on their own." The full transition to national ownership had already occurred in a number of countries, such as Croatia and Yemen.

She went on to say that the latest edition of the annual *Landmines Monitor* noted that the

deadly devices were still being used by two countries, in addition to rebel groups and other non-State actors in eight countries and territories, including Afghanistan, Colombia, India, Iraq, Lebanon, Myanmar, Pakistan and Chechnya.

Responding to a host of questions about cluster bombs allegedly used by Israel in the summer 2006 war against Hizbullah in Lebanon, Mr. Brady explained that under Protocol 5 of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), cluster munitions and bomblets that failed to explode were considered “explosive remnants of war” and thus, along with anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines, fell under the remit of UNMAS and the Ottawa Treaty.

He said that, while the situation was one of “complex record-keeping”, and given the absence of an exact record of cluster-bomb use in the 2006 conflict, UNMAS was in the process of clarifying the issues with the Israeli Government. Meanwhile, the Service had very good “ground truthing” about the situation in southern Lebanon, based on its experience since the end of hostilities.

Acknowledging that there were currently two relevant multilateral processes under way to elaborate a treaty specifically targeting cluster bombs, he said one fell within the CCW framework and the other had become known as the “Oslo Process”, which would essentially be a recognition by Member States of the humanitarian consequences flowing from the use of cluster munitions, which needed to be limited as much possible.

Turning to Afghanistan, he said there was mine contamination across most of that large, war-wracked country, but UNMAS had a “very good picture” of the depth of the problem following an extensive survey in 2004. That “snapshot” served as a baseline study, and was continually being updated. At the same time, mine action teams in Afghanistan had been experiencing severe security problems over the past two weeks, including the ambush of two groups of workers that had left eight people dead and a number injured. UNMAS had altered its operations to ensure the safety of the deminers, who included Afghan national organizations and international workers.

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