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Burma (Myanmar)

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History

The landmine problem in Burma, also known as Myanmar,¹ is severe because government forces and over a dozen rebel groups continue to use these weapons. Burma is one of the few countries where people are still emplacing anti-personnel landmines, and the number of rebel groups that use them grows each year. According to the *Landmine Monitor Report*, Burma has one of the highest annual landmine casualty rates in the world.²

Burma has not participated in any Ottawa Process meetings and has not signed the 1997 Ottawa Convention.³ Since 1996, the government has declined to vote on every U.N. General Assembly resolution banning mines.² There have been few attempts to begin demining. Currently, no humanitarian demining program exists, and only a few programs exist for mine risk education, which are run by international non-governmental organizations.

The Landmine Problem

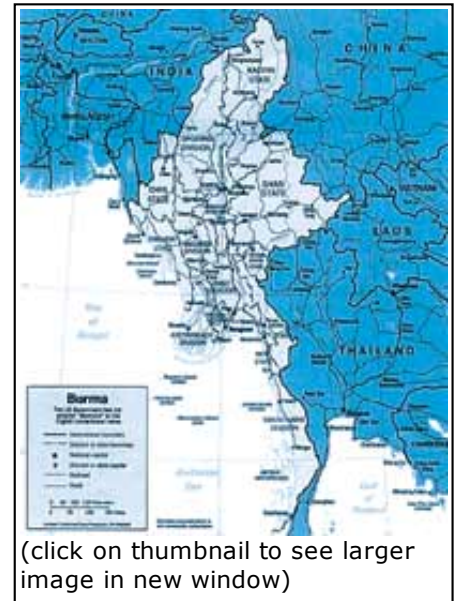
The Burmese military and armed ethnic groups have used landmines during the country's extended civil war. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines reports landmines encompassing nine of the 14 states and divisions in Burma, with the highest concentration of mines in the eastern part of the country.² There have also been recent reports of "atrocious demining" in the country. The government has been accused of using human minesweepers, forcing civilians to walk in front of troops to blow up mines.²

The armed forces of the ruling military junta have used mines to protect their camps and block infiltration routes, and they have been known to use them frequently in civilian areas, such as on roads and walkways. The army has also used landmines to prevent people from returning to their villages after forcibly evicting them in counterinsurgency campaigns.²

Since 2003, governmental representatives from Burma have attended sessions of the Ottawa Convention. For example, representatives traveled to Thailand to attend the open session of the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in September of 2003, as well as intersessional standing committee meetings. However, the government remains difficult to approach and the *Landmine Monitor's* repeated requests for current landmine information have gone unanswered.

Mine Action: Mine Risk Education and Advocacy

Currently, no humanitarian demining is being done in Burma, but there are a few mine risk education programs available through NGOs.⁴ In January 2003, Nonviolence International directed an advanced MRE program for cross-border medical workers in which 70 medics with the Backpack Health Worker Program were trained to find their way out of minefields and to remove mine victims from suspected mined areas. The workshop took place in Mae Sot, Thailand, on January 25, 2003. In June 2003, Mines Advisory Group held a five-day MRE workshop funded by the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program in Mawlamyaing, Mon state.⁵



In 2000, Nonviolence International also launched a Mine Ban Advocacy and Research Program in Burma. The program sought to engage authorities in the government, the National League of Democracy and the many non-state actors in Burma. In addition, the ICBL and NI teamed up to launch the "Halt Mine Use in Burma" campaign in mid-2004, encouraging all those serving in the military to halt mine use as the first step towards a complete ban for the country.⁴

Assistance to Mine Victims

Health care in Burma is extremely poor, limiting assistance for victims. However, some organizations have been able to provide assistance to landmine survivors. Clear Path International is an NGO serving landmine and bomb survivors and their families and communities in Burma and other Southeast Asian countries.⁶ The association assists with medical needs as well as social services and equipment support in local hospitals.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has provided rehabilitation programs for mine victims in Burma since 1986. It has also visited numerous people in detention facilities, visited detainees in prison and labor camps, and assessed the condition of detention and treatment. Additionally, the ICRC has provided prosthetic and orthotic services, supported the rehabilitation of seven hospitals in high-conflict areas in Burma, restored the water supply and made repairs to various rehabilitation facilities.⁷

Conclusion

With the problem of insurgency preventing Burma from signing the Ottawa Convention, as stated by a delegate of the Myanmar Red Cross/Ministry of Home Affairs in a seminar called "APMs: Are They Worth It?", it will be hard to determine when Burma will ever be mine-safe. Survivor assistance continues to be marginal, MRE programs are rarely available, landmine casualties appear to have increased within the past five years, and military forces and armed ethnic groups continue to use landmines extensively, groups such as NI, ICRC, and ICBL continue to fight the war against landmines to give victims hope.

Endnotes

1. Burma was named Myanmar by the military junta that took power in 1989. Many ethnic groups within the country still prefer to use the name Burma. For more information see the *CIA World Factbook* at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bm.html>. Accessed Nov. 16, 2005. Burma is referred to as the Union of Myanmar by the United Nations, but several countries including the United States, United Kingdom and Canada refer to Myanmar as Burma. More information can be found at <http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Myanmar>. Accessed Dec. 13, 2005.
2. "Burma (Myanmar)." *Landmine Monitor Report* 2004. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/burma>. Accessed Oct. 17, 2005.
3. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*. Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed Nov. 27, 2005.
4. "Landmines and Burma (Myanmar)." *International Campaign to Ban Landmines*. <http://www.icbl.org/problem/country/burma>. Accessed Oct. 17, 2005.
5. "Burma (Myanmar)." *Landmine Monitor Report* 2003. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2003/burma.html>. Accessed Nov. 16, 2005.
6. "Clear Path International (CPI)." *E-Mine: Electronic Mine Information Network*. <http://www.mineaction.org/org.asp?o=103>. Accessed Oct. 17, 2005.
7. "Myanmar." *ICRC Annual Report 2003*. [http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/622JFQ/\\$FILE/icrc_ar_03_Myanmar.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/622JFQ/$FILE/icrc_ar_03_Myanmar.pdf?OpenElement). Accessed Oct. 17, 2005.

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