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## Acting against Landmines: The Position of Handicap International

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**COLLECTION** development and strategies

*Strategies*

**Acting  
against  
landmines**

*The position of  
Handicap International*

*March 2001*

**HANDICAP  
INTERNATIONAL**

*Vivre debout*

# **Acting against Landmines**

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*The collection Strategies is aimed at presenting the viewpoint and position of Handicap International through comprehensive texts on ethical, political and social questions relating to international solidarity. The texts published are updated on an annual basis and according to major events.*

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## **Handicap International's actions against landmines: repairing, demining, preventing, banning.**

Handicap International provides help to people in situation of vulnerability, especially those in areas of low development and in conflict zones. The association specifically acts on behalf of people with disabilities, irrespective of the cause of their impairment (congenital or pre-natal problems, disease, accidents, violence or traumatism, malnutrition) and of its nature (physical, sensorial, intellectual).

Since its creation in 1982, Handicap International has been confronted with the widespread nature of the devastation caused by landmines, and especially by antipersonnel mines<sup>1</sup>. Tens of thousands of people who have benefited from Handicap International's assistance, share a common factor, one day, they have all gone one step too far...and involuntarily triggered the weapon which has shattered one or more of their limbs.

Initially involved in physical rehabilitation and orthopaedic appliances for mine victims, in 1992, Handicap International chose to extend its field of interventions to include the prevention of accidents caused by landmines, and the clearance, through demining

of affected areas. This broadening of activities in the fight against landmines is the result of considerations about public health and provides a preventive process aimed at reducing risk factors to combat one of the major disability generating scourges at source.

To offer a complete response, Handicap International's commitment could not be restricted to humanitarian and technical responses. The association has therefore got involved in initiating and running an international movement aimed at the total prohibition of landmines: the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

Today, in its comprehensive fight against landmines, Handicap International implements programmes in the following areas:

- rehabilitation, orthopaedic appliances, social and economic rehabilitation of mine victims;
- mine clearance and development of local capabilities in the fight against mines;
- education of populations in the prevention of mine accidents;

In parallel, Handicap International plays a determining role in the ICBL movement. The association also takes part, alongside

1. By landmines, we mean antipersonnel mines, anti-vehicles mines, and all other explosive devices which have the same characteristics and effects on their victims.

State representatives, in the expert steering committees which coordinate the process of

making the International Convention to Ban Landmines both universal and implemented.

## 1. Repairing: rehabilitation of mine victims

Handicap International's work aims at redeveloping people's abilities and autonomy, adapting the environmental factors, both social and physical - and for this reason, making sure that the service offer is appropriate to people's requirements -, and lastly, developing social participation so as to reduce the situations of disability, vulnerability and exclusion.

### 1.1. Physical rehabilitation and orthopaedic appliances

In countries recording a high level of landmine accidents, Handicap International is working to develop the offer of care in terms of rehabilitation and support in the social rehabilitation of the person. This work essentially focuses on:

- The training of local technicians to undertake the physical rehabilitation and fitting of orthopaedic appliances, and the psychological and social support of disabled people;
- Assistance in the creation of structures for rehabilitation, orthopaedic applanicing and production of orthopaedic equipment.

### 1.2. Live standing up

To fight against the all too often belittling ideas held about the disabled people, to enable each person to leave behind their

situation of victim or of disabled person, and to retain the social role to which they are entitled, Handicap International carries out complementary actions aimed at adapting the physical and social environment.

These actions which promote training, institutional and technical support involve:

- laws and policies aimed at the rehabilitation of disabled people, within the framework of citizenship and equal opportunities;
- professional and economic reintegration (access to employment and income);
- access to education, culture and sports;
- the emergence of associations for the disabled people and their families, and local initiatives in their favour;
- community information and awareness raising for improved acceptance of disabled people, and greater recognition of the part they play in contributing to family and community development initiatives.

Obviously, the resources to be implemented within the framework of providing victim assistance should be integrated into all public health programmes (vaccinations, hygiene, fight against parasitical diseases, and AIDS) and into social development

actions (fight against poverty and exclusion, local social-economic development), and should contribute to the reconstruction and reorganisation of public health and protection systems all too often disrupted by years of conflict.

In the same way, the aid provided should respect the principle of non-discrimination, and not only be of benefit to those injured or mutilated by mines, but also to all people

who are victims of violence or traumatism, to all disabled people, and on a wider scale to all communities living in regions afflicted by this deadly pollution<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Prevention of landmine accidents and mine clearance

In parallel with its medico-social action, Handicap International implements, runs and supervises programmes for mine clearance and for the prevention of landmine accidents. The association supports the development of techniques and technology applied to the detection, identification and marking of mined areas and to mine clearance.

### 2.1. Prevention of landmine accidents: helping populations to live with the threat of mines

Programmes of education for the prevention of landmine and other explosive devices accidents (Mine Risk Education) are aimed at civilian populations travelling through, or living in, mined regions (displacement, or return of refugee and/or displaced populations).

The general objective of these programmes is to enable vulnerable populations to manage risks both on a daily and long term basis, and to contribute to a reduction in the number of victims.

Each programme therefore aims at acquiring knowledge, skills and appropriate behaviour so that each individual might select the wisest attitude to avoid "risk" situations.

These programmes mainly consist in:

- gathering data on landmine accidents and victims, in order to define the most "vulnerable" populations, as well as the most suitable prevention messages;
- educating and mobilising the populations by means of information and training campaigns, which are themselves based on the tools and involvement of local networks (professional groups, traditional and religious authorities,

2. Read "Towards Real Assistance to Landmine Victims - The position of Handicap International", Collection Development and Strategies, Monitoring and Positioning Service (SVP), Handicap International, Lyon, December 2000.

national or local administrations, etc);

- educating and mobilising children using the schooling system or any other educational network, by developing teaching aids, training and specific activities.

The Handicap International programmes aim at reaching as many inhabitants as possible in a mine-affected territory (or displaced persons/refugees living in camps and potentially at risk), whilst at the same time involving the existing communities and networks - from the design of messages right up to their distribution - with an aim towards guaranteeing the relevance and sustainability of educational actions to the benefit of all vulnerable populations, to continue after Handicap International's withdrawal.

Only those situations categorised as "emergency" will lead to the development of mass media and action development without the close involvement of the communities, but will nevertheless seek optimum information accessibility, respect the language and culture concerned and take all available data on accidents into account.

The success of these prevention programmes is also due to continuous "quality control" (observation, monitoring and evaluation tools, capitalisation on experience); and, depending on the context, to in-depth coordination with other organisations involved in landmine prevention programmes, mine clearance operations, surveys and mine ban campaigns (ICBL).

## 2.2. Mine clearance: bring the Land back to life

"Mine clearance" is a general term covering consecutive operations:

- identification and checking of zones suspected to be mined;
- demarcation and registration of mined zones;
- marking of these zones;
- detection, localisation, identification and destruction of the mines<sup>3</sup>.

Handicap International promotes humanitarian civilian mine clearance, which gives priority to the requirements of vulnerable populations.

In fact, as opposed to military mine clearance, which is largely designed to open up a breach or pathway through a mine field, with the set objective of enabling a combat or logistics unit to pass through<sup>4</sup>, humanitarian civilian mine clearance aims at clearing zones and infrastructures in order to let communities return to normal life, to reintegrate displaced populations and to restart economic and social activities. This type of mine clearance is carried out in a post-war context, to allow reconstruction activities, and seeks to achieve a 100% mine destruction rate.

Humanitarian civilian mine clearance is orientated towards two types of objectives:

- structural (priority to clearing infrastructures);
- community ("proximity" mine clearance,

3. Mine clearance aims at eliminating all explosive devices, whatever the type (antipersonnel and anti-vehicles mines, unexploded munitions, sub-munitions, etc.).

4. This type of mine clearance is carried out in the context of war, used in offensive action, as is considered satisfactory when a lower mine destruction rate is achieved (80%).



consisting of clearing areas in and around where communities live, and which do not automatically show up as national priorities in terms of mine clearance).

On the technical scale, Handicap International considers that manual mine clearance, despite being time consuming, remains the most efficient and safe method. The mine detection rate is high and corresponds with objectives set by proximity humanitarian civilian mine clearance. It can be adapted to all types of ground, and does not affect the environment.

Manual mine clearance may be combined with the use of sniffer dogs for the detection of the explosives contained in the mines<sup>5</sup> and with mechanical means (vehicles with flails and rollers). However, it cannot be denied that, as things stand, the deminer and the manual approach<sup>6</sup> cannot be replaced in achieving the aims of proximity humanitarian civilian mine clearance. Handicap International has opted to integrate these new "tools" in order to reduce the time taken for mine clearance operations to the benefit of the populations affected.

### 2.3. The development of local capacities in the fight against mines

Mine clearance operations are costly and the international financial resources that can be mobilised are limited. The extent and type of pollution by mines necessitate a long term approach, especially in poor countries. As a result, the development of local capabilities in the fight against mines is the only feasible long term solution.

Handicap International offers structural support to local organisations responsible for anti-mine action in the following areas:

- organisation of logistic, administrative and financial functions;
- collection, processing, analyse and mapping out of information concerning mine pollution, the progress and scope of mine clearance activities;
- optimisation of operational procedures in verifying and marking mined areas;
- creation of regional mine clearance units;
- coordination of Mine Risk Education Programmes<sup>7</sup>.

5. *Dogs are valuable allies for deminers as they have exceptional olfactory capacities, but their performance can vary according to climatic conditions, variation in the dogs mood, and the quality of the relationship the dog has with its handler. Handicap International has integrated this new "tool" into the resources implemented in its programmes (read bibliography).*

6. *Mechanical means are rarely useful in proximity humanitarian civilian mine clearance. Their low rate of mine destruction, due to the lack of precision in locating explosive devices and the considerable restrictions in their implementation (numerous qualified personnel, logistic difficulties, with work needed on access to sites, high overall costs), make these machines un-adapted for the greater number of grounds and conditions. Whatever the case, they should be used in conjunction with manual mine clearance. Mechanical methods were the subject of a survey published by Handicap International in 2000. Their use within Handicap International's programmes as an additional tool to be made available to deminers is being researched. The use of these devices is specifically aimed at reducing the "preparation" time for areas to be cleared: triggering the antipersonnel fragmentation mine trip wires and brush cutting to enable the use of metal detectors.*

7. *To describe its own activities Handicap International refers to Mine Risk Education rather than to Mine Awareness, more general.*

## 3. International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)

### Nobel Peace Prize 1997

#### 3.1. Mobilisation of the civil society and citizen diplomacy

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is a movement originating from the civil society, and is composed of non governmental organisations (NGO). It was founded in 1992 by six associations, including Handicap International, and now has more than a thousand member organisations.

The objective of the ICBL is to make the total ban on antipersonnel mines a new international standard to be respected by all. Total ban covers the production of mines and their components, transfers (import and export), stockpiling and use<sup>8</sup>.

Since 1992, ICBL activities have been based on informing and mobilising the citizens, mobilising the media, advocating and placing pressure on national and international governing bodies. ICBL has set up a network, publishing an annual report (the *Landmine Monitor*), designed to monitor the implemen-

tation of the provisions of the Convention, and to observe the development of problems linked to the presence of landmines in the concerned countries. Naturally, the ICBL is also campaigning for the mobilisation and augmentation of international resources (financial and technical) for mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance.

Handicap International is a member of the Steering Committee which coordinates ICBL's action. The association plays an active role in thematic working groups: Victim assistance, Mine clearance, Mine awareness, the Ottawa Treaty. In addition, it is closely associated with the initiatives for monitoring the implementation of the Treaty. Handicap International takes part as an expert organisation working alongside the States in drawing up policy and standards for action within the framework of the Convention to Ban Landmines Inter-Sessional Committee of Experts (ISCE).

This commitment was acknowledged by the award of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, which

8. *Essential at a humanitarian level, this prohibition also appears feasible at a strategic level. If military officers refrain themselves to express publicly their opinion, a growing number of them, including high rank officers of different nationalities are, out of record or when retired, confirming that the effectiveness of landmines is not proven, insofar as modern armies are well able to bypass such obstacles. The ban on landmines would therefore not place troops in signatory countries in a position of danger or inferiority.*

was granted collectively to all the associations members of ICBL<sup>9</sup>.

### 3.2. The "Ottawa Process" and the Convention to Ban Landmines

Following the failure of the United Nations Conference in 1996 aimed at revising a convention governing the use of antipersonnel landmines<sup>10</sup>, and confronted with the United Nation's Disarmament Conference's inability to reach a satisfactory result, Handicap International supported the "Ottawa Process".

The "Ottawa Process" was a Canadian initiative which led to the signing in December 1997 of a convention to ban use, stockpiling, production and transfer of landmines, and for their destruction. Coming into force in March 1999, the Convention to Ban Landmines has now been signed by 139 States and ratified by 110 of them<sup>11</sup>. On a diplomatic level, the existence of a new standard and a core of solidarity stigmatises those States hiding their refusal to give up unacceptable military and trade practises behind technical and strategic arguments. Little by little, the States that have decided to comply with International Humanitarian Law are subscribing to this total ban, which has now become a new

international standard, covering even those countries that still refuse to place their foot on the right path. The first effects of this treaty can already be measured: landmine production has dropped considerably, official transfers have practically disappeared, and approximately one tenth of the world's stockpile has already been destroyed.

The Convention also lays down cooperative measures in terms of assistance, Mine Risk Education and mine clearance. By this, the richer States are placed under the obligation to support the poorer States in their repairing and assistance efforts.

### 3.3. Action in Europe

In Europe, the Handicap International sections have lobbied in favour of national laws being voted for total ban and the setting up of independent watchdog commissions in their countries of origin<sup>12</sup>.

The sections have also demanded that the intentions declared on an international level should be translated into action on the national and community levels within the European Union. At a diplomatic level, the governments of the Handicap International's section's countries (France, Belgium,

9. *The Nobel Peace Prize is an undeniable recognition of the International Campaign. Efforts towards universalising can now be based on the recognition offered by the Nobel Peace Prize to all the NGOs actively campaigning in countries where free speech remains a high risk activity. However this prize is not a result in itself. The objective the ICBL has set for itself is still the total elimination of mines, thanks to total prohibition, as well as the deployment of real and worthy assistance to the populations that have to live with this deadly pollution.*

10. *"The 1980 Convention", revised in 1996: "Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects", wherein one of the appendix protocols (Protocol II) concerns "the ban or restriction of landmines, booby-traps and other devices". Complex and inadequate, the "1980 Convention" aimed less at restricting or banning the use of mines than delimiting the field of authorisations which would enable their continued use.*

11. *Situation in November 2000.*

12. *Measures of this type have been adopted in Belgium, Italy and France.*

Switzerland, United Kingdom, Luxembourg and Germany) are invited to continue their efforts within the European Union, with their regional security organisations or alliances, and with the countries with which they have diplomatic relations, in order to consolidate the process of universalising the total ban on antipersonnel mines.

Through maintaining the mobilisation of public opinion, that of the elected representatives and the governments at a national level, as well as at a community level, the Handicap International sections are now bringing their efforts to bear on a significant development in landmine victim assistance, Mine Risk Education and mine clearance.

## Appendix 1

### Eight reasons to ban landmines

#### 1. A serious violation of International Humanitarian Law

Due to their specific characteristics and the methods employed, the use of landmines constitutes a serious violation of International Humanitarian Law (Geneva Convention and additional protocols). These laws apply to all governments, independent of conventional obligations, and compel conflicting parties to differentiate between civilians and combatants, therefore never attacking civilians or using weapons in an indiscriminate manner. As a result, those States, that indirectly (through production or transfer) or directly (through use) contribute to the proliferation of antipersonnel mines, participate in the violation of International Humanitarian Law. However, the proliferation of antipersonnel mines and the deadly pollution that it engenders also touch on other standards and areas such as Human Rights, laws governing the environment and those covering development, which all taken together make up International Law.

#### 2. A weapon that strikes without discrimination

Antipersonnel mines are designed to be triggered by the presence, the proximity of, or

by involuntary contact with a person. The landmine is therefore the only weapon to be triggered by its victim. It can kill or mutilate without distinction or reason. By definition, the landmine is an indiscriminate weapon striking both combatants and civilians, adults and children. The survey of accidents caused by landmines over the last decade proves that civilian populations are the first victims of landmines. Several hundreds of thousands have been affected in twenty years. Every year, thousands of victims are recorded in approximately seventy countries where the data is accessible. To obtain an idea of the scale on an international level, we would obviously have to add the large number of victims that have not been recorded. This would bring the total number to approximately 20,000 victims per year.

#### 3. An uncontrollable weapon

What distinguishes antipersonnel mines from every other sort of weapon is that once they are placed they are completely out of control and can remain armed for dozens of years. As for the programmable, so called "smart" mines, equipped with a disarming or automatic destruction system, they are, despite their name, neither intelligent nor reliable. Just like any other mine, they strike combatants

and civilians indiscriminately during the time that they are armed. In addition, their programming mechanisms have failed to demonstrate the required level of reliability to guarantee total safety for the populations once the conflict is over. Antipersonnel mines are a danger and a threat to the safety and well-being of civilian populations, both in war and in peacetime.

#### **4. Effects out of all proportion**

Whilst fragmentation mines are designed to kill, blast effect mines are designed to mutilate: the aims sought after by the users are to cause serious injury, to demoralise the adversary through the psychological impact on the population, to make the injured person a constant drain on the opposing camp, for the health system and for their community. The mines inflict serious injuries which lead to deadly traumatic consequences in fifty percent of cases. Children have less chance of survival as they are more fragile. The harder it is to reach a care establishment, the greater is the level of mortality. The psychological and social consequences are just as serious as the physical damage. Mutilation leads to a restriction in physical capacity which prevents the person from fulfilling its role in society, and very often, the mutilated person no longer has any self worth as a real human being. The family and the community, themselves traumatised by the context, stigmatise and reject the disabled person who becomes a social outcast. The feeling of rejection, or of being abandoned, of being a social outcast, can lead to abject depression, alcoholism, violence or suicide.

#### **5. An excessive drain on**

#### **health services**

Extremely serious injuries caused by landmines overload health services, which are all too often already under considerable strain during periods of conflict or reconstruction. In the poorer countries, the effort allocated for the care and rehabilitation of the landmine victims is a drain on resources more usefully employed in the prevention and the campaign against major illnesses (tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, malaria, AIDS). Indirectly, the presence of landmines hinders any improvement in sanitary conditions, insofar as it restricts the access of populations to health services, drinking water and cultivable land.

#### **6. Holding back development**

The presence of landmines holds back, delays or paralyses national and international economic and social rehabilitation, reconstruction and development work in societies and regions recovering from a war situation. Landmines perpetuate the war in peacetime. The presence of landmines contributes to poverty and works against reconstruction and development in almost ninety countries. In heavily polluted areas, not only does the population suffer greatly, but the threat of the landmines prohibits access to, use of, and cultivation of agricultural land, communication and irrigation systems and natural resources. To the economic poverty are added the isolation and the territorial fragmentation which encourage the emergence of lawless regions.

#### **7. Increasingly complex mine clearance**

The plethora of types of landmine (over 360

models produced by 50 States over the last two decades), their proliferation and their uncontrolled use, coupled with remote mine laying methods (hundreds or thousands projected from aircraft, mine launching vehicles or artillery fire), make it impossible to survey and precisely mark out the mined areas. The task of the mine clearers, a work of Titan, is extremely dangerous, even more so as the new generations of mines are increasingly sophisticated. For example, there are now landmines made in plastics which do not contain enough metal to be found with standard metal detectors, or mines that are fitted with anti-lifting devices. Designed to defy mine clearance activity, they contain a system which triggers an explosion if they are moved or swept by a metal detector.

## **8. An obstacle to peace**

The presence of landmines constitutes an obstacle to the implementation of peace plans and to the repatriation and reinsertion of refugee and displaced populations in post-war periods.

**Taking all these factors into account, it is imperative that we achieve a total ban on antipersonnel mines.**

## Appendix 2

### General recommendations for the international community

#### **1. To achieve total prohibition of antipersonnel mines**

- 1.1. All States must adhere to the International Convention to Ban Landmines. Those who have already done so should implement all of the measures guaranteeing total prohibition, at a national level.
- 1.2. In addition to their international agreement to renounce to antipersonnel mines by signing and ratifying the Ottawa Convention, in order to guarantee the force of its commitment, it is still essential that each government respects the provisions of the Treaty by implementing measures that are genuine and verifiable.
- 1.3. In order to guarantee the enduring nature of renunciation, States should adopt national legislation prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling, sale, transfers and use of antipersonnel mines and their components.
- 1.4. States should ensure that national companies with set-ups abroad, also respect such injunctions. They must ensure that national companies, also activities are partially affected by such legislation, do not move to other countries or become partners in other foreign production companies.
- 1.5. Consequently, States should ensure that military training and instruction aids for the armed forces are effectively modified and clearly integrate the ban on the use of landmines in any circumstances.
- 1.6. States should guarantee parliaments and the general public total transparency in terms of information on the implementation of measures renouncing to antipersonnel mines. This involves the setting up of monitoring bodies, independent of the military and industrial sectors concerned, with ongoing activity and the power to make their observations public.
- 1.7. States should multiply diplomatic initiatives to convince other governments that a total ban on landmines is the only acceptable answer in view of the human and economic consequences of their proliferation on civilian populations. Renouncing to the use of antipersonnel mines, in compliance with a respect for human rights, should be a condition for the continuation of bilateral cooperation in the military sphere.
- 1.8. States should implement the sanctions laid down in the Convention against those member States that renege on their commitments.



## 2. Developing victim assistance and mine clearance

2.1. States, inter-governmental and regional organisations with universal responsibilities should make major efforts to increase aid to populations that are either the victims of, or are threatened by, mine pollution.

2.2. Within the framework of international cooperation, States must increase technical and financial efforts made to help populations in countries affected by landmines, and support the assistance to mine victims, the prevention of mine related accidents and the mine clearance.

2.3. The funds mobilised for anti-mine actions and victim assistance should not be taken out of resources already built up for development aid.

2.4. Considering the extent of mine pollution, the damage caused, the requirements of the victims, their families and all the communities involved, and further considering the major cost of mine clearance and assistance operations, as well as the limited nature of financial resources that can be mobilised to these ends, the greater part of international community efforts must bear on the development of local capacities in terms of medico-social assistance, prevention and mine clearance.

2.5. The international community will place the emphasis on actions with a global approach, to be continued over a period of time, and offering proximity responses that, first of all, meet a human development logic, and which primarily provide help to vulnera-

ble populations.

2.6. In order to contribute to breaking down the perverse spiral of the landmine market, trading companies belonging to industrial groups that produce antipersonnel mines should be systematically distanced from calls to tender put out by national and international organisations for the implementation of mine clearance programs.

2.7. As total transparency is the only way of maintaining large scale mobilisation in favour of the Convention to Ban Landmines, to provide an example, to coordinate the efforts made and to measure the progress achieved, States should reveal, unilaterally, as within the framework of the Convention, the financial and technical efforts they have made in terms of assistance or anti-mines action. States - both donors and beneficiaries - would periodically make public the programmes that have been supported, the amount of the contributions, the intermediary or operating institutions, and the beneficiary populations.

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