



Press centre

Statement

UNICEF calls for universal ban of landmines at 10 year review of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention

Statement by Bernt Aasen, Regional Director, Latin America and the Caribbean

Cartagena, Colombia , 4 December 2009 - It is my honour to join you today at this ten-year review of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention. I'd like to extend my thanks to the Government of Colombia for graciously hosting this important event in such a beautiful and historic location.

We are here to celebrate ten years of progress towards eliminating an inhumane weapon and of supporting those that have survived its effects. In doing so, we honour the governments, international organisations, and members of civil society that joined together to make the Mine Ban Convention a reality. At the inception of the mine ban movement, there were those who said it could not be done. They were wrong, and were proved wrong once again with the signing of the Convention on Cluster Munitions by over 100 countries. Now we need both to be universally ratified.

With UNICEF, I have had the privilege to live and work in Nicaragua, Sudan and Afghanistan. I have seen firsthand what landmines can do to children. It's cruel and must end.

In November, the world celebrated another landmark – the 20 year anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which established, among other things, a child's right to protection. UNICEF views the Mine Ban and Cluster Munitions Conventions as important elements to help fulfill those rights. Likewise, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability provides yet another instrument to ensure the equal fulfillment of the rights of landmine victims and indeed all persons with disabilities.

Through the collective efforts and the political will of all those represented in this room, tremendous progress has been made. Still, there are too many casualties and, according to the Landmine Monitor, in 2008 almost half of all civilian casualties were children. Children are far less likely to survive a mine explosion than an adult. Those who do survive often suffer permanent disability. Access to rehabilitation may not be available, and a child mine survivor may be deprived of schooling. The effects multiply.

In mine affected communities, children's every day activities can have a sudden end - whether it is playing and exploring, or when they are forced by poverty to provide for the family by working the fields, herding livestock, fetching water, or collecting firewood. Mines and poverty are mutually reinforcing, in a uniquely brutal and destructive sense. Poverty pushes adults and children alike to take greater risks. At the same time, the presence of mines contributes to food insecurity, reduces health and hygiene by denying access to shelter, water and sanitation, and inhibits rehabilitating and access to economic infrastructure. By blocking local and national development, mines undermine the fundamental human right to peace and security, and every child's right to protection, to health and to education.

Over the years UNICEF has supported over 30 countries in implementing activities to protect and reduce risks for all vulnerable populations, including initiatives that improve prioritization, planning, quality and sustainability. We have a consistent track record in developing the capacities of governments and the NGO community to do so, which makes the interventions ever more cost-effective and sustainable.

With respect to mine risk education, however, I would like to be very clear on one point. Although we can, and should, continue to discuss how to make mine risk education more effective there is no doubt in our mind that it is a right, and an obligation. UNICEF firmly believes that if an area is contaminated with mines and ERW then the people living in or passing through it have a right to know about the risks, in as much detail as possible. This implies, then, that States and others have an obligation to make that information available, and that it is incumbent on the international community to provide adequate resources to educate people of the dangers in their midst.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, in the years since the Nairobi Review Conference we also have witnessed a dramatic evolution in the approach towards protecting children from armed conflict. The UN Security Council and the General Assembly have definitively declared certain actions as unacceptable. Most recently, in passing Resolution 1882 the Security Council affirmed that patterns of killing and maiming children, including through the indiscriminate use of landmines and cluster munitions, is not acceptable and would trigger its action. UNICEF works closely with the Secretary General and his Special Representative on Children Affected by Armed Conflict to support the Security Council and end the deplorable acts of armed forces and groups against children, including the impact of indiscriminate weapons.

This must end. It can end and I hope the centers for victim assistance I have visited in Nicaragua, Sudan and Afghanistan soon are not needed anymore. UNICEF's plea to all countries is this: No new mines, no new victims, and let's join together to redouble our efforts to fulfill the rights of those victims we did not manage to protect in time.

Thank you.

UNICEF video and high-resolution photography for media organizations is available at:

<http://www.thenewsmarket.com/unicef>

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

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