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A Message from the Secretary-General

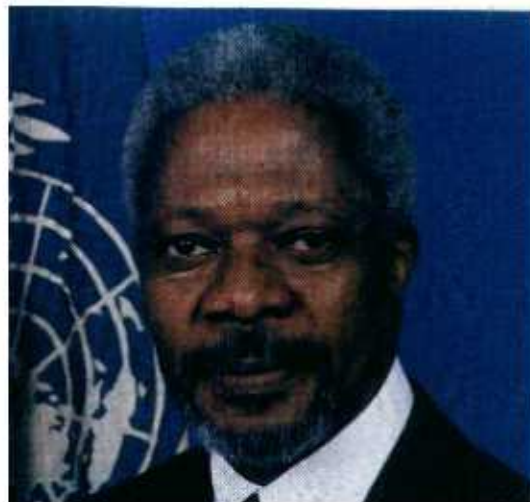
From my experience in peacekeeping, I have seen first-hand the literally crippling effects of landmines on people and communities alike. Not only do these abominable weapons lie buried in silence and in their millions, waiting to kill or maim innocent women and children; but the presence — or even the fear of the presence — of a single landmine can prevent the cultivation of an entire field, rob a whole village of its livelihood, place yet another obstacle on a country's road to reconstruction and development. This ugly legacy of conflict, which lives on long after the fighting has died down, also threatens the ability of the United Nations to provide humanitarian assistance where it is most needed.

In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly included "Assistance in mine clearance" in its agenda — reflecting international recognition that landmines constitute a serious humanitarian emergency. As a result, the concept of a United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) was conceived — an innovative, collaborative policy approach transcending national boundaries.

UNMAS presents a rational solution to a complex problem. It combines the resources, expertise, and compassion of the UN system, of donors, and of NGOs. In this way, UNMAS is a fine example of United Nations reform working at its best. The consolidation of resources and the coordination of activities addresses the problem of landmine contamination in the context of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, with a view to enabling long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Through the work of UNMAS, awareness of the dangers posed by landmines is growing every day — particularly among women, children and the rural poor. Country-specific clearance programmes are restoring to productivity arable land once deemed unusable. Mine victims are receiving effective medical care to become productive members of society. And thanks to a unique partnership between Governments and civil society, the Ottawa Treaty banning the use of anti-personnel mines has entered into force.

Much remains to be done. UNMAS is well-positioned to mobilize strategies and coordinate programmes, to undertake new assessment missions; to locate mined areas and identify their impact on the surrounding population; to work to ensure that the terms of the Ottawa Treaty are respected; and to encourage



those nations who have not yet signed or ratified the treaty to do so. It should be recalled, however, that UNMAS relies for some of its funding on the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action. Its ability to carry out that work therefore depends on the generosity of donors to the Fund.

The coordinated policy approach pioneered by UNMAS provides vivid and welcome proof that cooperation and sharing of common resources among a diverse set of partners can yield a distinctive set of results. All those committed to working toward eradicating landmines, and to restoring hope to the millions affected deserve our appreciation and gratitude. To the donors, whose generous support has made their work possible, we offer our heartfelt thanks and the hope of an ever stronger partnership in the future.

So long as there is war and conflict in the world, there will be humanitarian emergencies. So long as there are landmines in the ground, people will be deprived of their basic right to a decent life; communities will be denied the opportunity to prosper, nations will be depleted of resources needed to rebuild and develop. Yet with the continued support of Member States, we have the means to end this suffering. To that end, the United Nations Mine Action Service is one of our most precious resources.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "K. Annan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations
April 1999

What is Mine Action?

Nearly a third of the world's nations are, to some extent, contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance. Among the countries most severely affected are those that are least developed, struggling to provide their societies with even the most basic of means. In the past, the problem had been almost exclusively defined by the sheer numbers of landmines deployed. This approach may have provided a convenient, albeit debatable, reference point, but it failed to reveal the appalling consequences of these pernicious weapons. Only recently have the subsidiary effects caused by landmines, like economic marginalization and prolonged victim's trauma, been seriously acknowledged.

Too often it is the civil society that bears the ultimate physical and psychological burdens of these virtually undetectable and indiscriminate killers. In the past decade alone, civilians by the tens of thousands have become casualties long after the fighting has stopped and the combatants have withdrawn. A large majority of landmine victims tend to be concentrated in the poorest sectors of society, where just surviving is an enormous day-to-day challenge. The presence, or perceived presence, of a few anti-personnel mines has the power to disrupt an entire community. Subsistence farmers, fleeing refugees, internally displaced persons and particularly women and children are among the most vulnerable. This broadens significantly the scope and nature of the problem, framing it in a humanitarian context.

Most national and local programmes have generally focused their resources on the activity of clearance, with a number of governments effectively containing the situation within their own borders. Yet ongoing regional and internal conflicts offset real gains made in the area of removal. Farmlands continue to go unused, roads remain closed and villages eventually abandoned. The problem is complex, with clearance representing only part of the solution.

United Nations mine action was developed as a multi-dimensional response embodying the most basic of humanitarian principles. It is defined by a distinct set of activities conceived to abate the effects inflicted upon civil societies as a result of extensive landmine contamination. Mine action is not just about weapons, but about people. Its objective though technical in practice is benevolent in consequence. The goal of UN mine action is simple: To recreate an environment where people can live safely, where victims needs are addressed, and where economic health and social development can occur free from the constraints imposed by landmines.

The Core Elements of UN MINE ACTION

**Mine awareness and risk
reduction education**

**Minefield survey, mapping,
marking and clearance**

**Assistance to victims,
including rehabilitation and
reintegration**

**Advocacy to stigmatize the
use of landmines and sup-
port of a total ban on APMs**



UN AGENCIES INVOLVED IN MINE ACTION

UNMAS - UN FOCAL POINT FOR
MINE ACTION

UNOPS - IMPLEMENTS MINE
ACTION PROGRAMMES

UNHCR - RESPONSIBLE FOR
REFUGEE/IDP SAFETY

WFP - FOOD ASSISTANCE AND
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

OCHA - HUMANITARIAN IMPLICATIONS
OF THE ISSUE

WHO - ADVISES ON PUBLIC HEALTH
CONSEQUENCES

UNDP - DEVELOPS INDIGENOUS
CAPACITIES

IBRD - FINANCES DEVELOPMENT AND
RECONSTRUCTION INITIATIVES

UNICEF - MINE AWARENESS
EDUCATION

DDA - RESPONSIBLE FOR DISARMAMENT
ISSUES INCLUDING OTTAWA TREATY

The United Nations...

monitors the landmine threat,

identifies the extent of the
problem,

identifies the impact of the
problem,

works with governments
to build new capacity,

promotes the development of
new technologies,

develops and **prioritizes** solutions to solving the landmine problem.

