

ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES: A DISGRACE FOR HUMANITY

Those who look after people injured by anti-personnel mines and who, day after day, witness the suffering caused by these pernicious weapons, those who produce artificial limbs to help maimed children as they try to cope with their disability all ask themselves what can be done to put an end to this terrible scourge.

Out of a total of 14,221 war-wounded treated in ICRC hospitals in Asia between January 1991 and June 1992, 23% were injured by anti-personnel mines. Out of 3,262 mine-blast victims, 21% were women and children, plus a number of men who never took part in the fighting.

Last year, 7,876 amputees — 26% of them women and children — were fitted with artificial limbs in the ICRC's rehabilitation centres.

These statistics are grim evidence that the extensive efforts made over the years to regulate the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines, and to ensure that people not taking part in the fighting are protected from them, have been to no avail.

Moreover, in many instances mines are no longer used to protect military objectives or to block access routes, but are laid with the perverse intent of terrorizing the civilian population.

Rather than discourage us, this should motivate us even more in our efforts to make those with authority over users and manufacturers face up to their responsibility. And the way to do this is to show them just how devastating these weapons are.

The ICRC has decided to organize a symposium next spring on victims of anti-personnel mines. The issue will be discussed from a variety of angles — political, military, legal and medical; the meeting will also focus on the problems of mine-clearing and rehabilitation. The primary objective will be to work out complementary means of action and to propose a strategy to protect the civilian population from the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines.

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*This article by the ICRC's Chief Medical Officer appeared in the November 1992 issue of the **ICRC Bulletin**. The ICRC symposium on the victims of anti-personnel mines will take place in Montreux (Switzerland) from 21 to 23 April 1993. The participants will deal with various aspects of the problem of anti-personnel mines, including legal (the present provisions under international law and their application), technical and tactical (technical characteristics of mines, mine detection and clearance), medical and humanitarian (mine-blast injuries, rehabilitation of victims) and military aspects.*

*The **Review** will report on the work of the symposium in one of its forthcoming issues and will devote a special issue to this subject, the importance of which will undoubtedly be clear to all readers.*
