Landmines

The Issue
What makes anti-personnel landmines so abhorrent is the indiscriminate destruction they cause. Landmines cannot be aimed. They lie dormant until a person or animal triggers their detonating mechanism. Anti-personnel landmines cannot distinguish between the footfall of a soldier and that of a child.

LANDMINE FACTSHEET
There are two categories of landmines: anti-personnel (AP) and anti-tank or anti-vehicle (AT):

- **Anti-personnel (AP) landmine** - A mine designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person and that will incapacitate, injure or kill one or more persons.
- **Anti-tank (AT) landmine** - An AT mine is a device designed to detonate by more than 100 kilograms of pressure. AT mines cannot distinguish between a tank and tractor.

There are different types of AP mines according to the type of injuries they inflict:

- **Blast mines**: usually hand-laid on or under the ground or scattered from the air. The explosive force of the mine causes foot, leg, and groin injuries and secondary infections usually result in amputation.
- **Fragmentation mines**: usually laid on or under the ground and often activated by tripwire or other means. When detonated the explosion projects hundreds of fragments at ballistic speed of up to 50 metres resulting in fragmentation wounds. Some fragmentation mines contain a primary charge to lift the mine above the ground (about 1 to 1.5 metres) before detonating which can injure an adult’s abdomen, genitals and take off a child’s head.

New developments in mine technology:

- **Plastic mines**: Undetectable by metal detectors used by deminers.
- **Remotely delivered (R/D) or scatterable mines**: Usually disseminated from aircraft, helicopters or artillery. Accurate mapping, recording and marking mines laid in this manner is impossibly.
- **Anti-handling devices**: A device intended to protect the mine and is activated when an attempt is made to tamper with or otherwise intentionally disturb the mine. (Mine Ban Treaty definition).
- **Self-destruct (S/D) mines**: So-called “smart” mines are designed to self-destruct after a designated period of time. If they fail to self-destruct, these mines are also sometimes designed to self-deactivate. There is nothing smart about these mines though - while armed they cannot discriminate between a soldier and a civilian.

Timeline . . . . . the story of a deadly weapon

1916-18 Precursors to landmines: artillery shells buried with exposed fuses, to block the advance of tanks during World War I
1939-45 Anti-tank mines widely used by all sides during World War 2: smaller anti-personnel mines also developed
1960s “Scatterable” mines invented and dropped from planes during the Vietnam War
1970s Pressure by International Committee of the Red Cross for governments to increase restrictions on injurious weapons
1980s UN Inhuman Weapons Convention prohibiting the use of landmines but leaving major loopholes (especially concerning the delayed effects of landmines)
1992 Launch of the International Campaign to ban Landmines (ICBL)
1997 “Ottawa Convention” (also known as the Mine Ban Treaty) to ban stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, signed by 122 countries including NZ
1997 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Jody Williams and ICBL
1999 Ottawa Convention (signed by 133 countries, ratified by 65) enters into force worldwide
It is believed there are 60 to 70 million mines in place around the world. Just a handful of mines - or the mere suspicion that an area is mined - can make that land unusable for human activity.

Leading producers and exporters of anti-personnel mines in the past 25 years include China, Italy, the former Soviet Union, and the United States. More than 50 countries have manufactured as many as 200 million anti-personnel landmines in the last 25 years. More than 350 different types of anti-personnel mines exist.

Landmines have a devastating effect, not only on the people they kill and injure but also on everyone who lives in the area. Landmines are now a daily threat in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Chechnya, Croatia, Iraq, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Somalia, and dozens of other countries. Mines recognise no cease-fire and long after the fighting has stopped they continue to maim or kill. Mines also render large tracts of agricultural land unusable, wreaking environmental and economic devastation. Refugees returning to their war-ravaged countries face this life-threatening obstacle to rebuilding their lives.

Impact of Landmines

- **Pressure on medical services** hospitals overcrowded, few services left for other needs.
- **Loss of agricultural land**, less food, loss of property and opportunities for work.
- **Pressure on the environment** overfarming of remaining land, danger to wildlife and scarring caused by exploding landmines.
- **Delaying return of refugees** puts pressure on refugee camps, fewer people to rebuild country.
- **Destruction of roads, railways etc** access to places difficult.
- **Suffering of victims and families** death, injury, loss of income, perpetual fear.
- **Loss of productive workforce** with fewer people to work the land.

Impact of landmines.
Different groups of people have different viewpoints about the use of landmines. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, for example, argue landmines do not obey the laws of war and therefore are an illegal weapon. The laws of war dictate that soldiers and their weapons discriminate between soldiers and civilians. Additionally, there is to be a balance between military need and consequences to the civilian population.

Most AP mines are designed to maim, in order to overload the enemy’s support system. In the countries where landmines have been used in great numbers, the impact is overwhelming. The psychological effect of landmines on the enemy is undeniable, but landmines also terrorize and demoralize civil society. Put simply, anything that landmines can do to an enemy’s army, they can do to a civilian population. What they cannot do is discriminate between the soldier and the civilian. Neither can their impact be confined to the duration of the battle.

However the continued use of landmines and the fact that 48 countries have not signed the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty makes it clear that not all groups and nations agree with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

The issue of banning landmines has implications for people both now and in the future. Even if no more mines were ever laid, they will continue to maim and kill for years to come. Bold steps must be taken now to save future generations of innocent civilians. If sufficient funds were provided, deminers from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) say that mine clearance to restore daily life to near normal levels may be achieved in years, not decades.

The issue of banning landmines is geographic in nature because of the devastating effect, not only on people but also because of their effect on the environment.
What can be done about landmines?

1. Mine awareness
   In countries where live landmines remain widespread, teaching people how to recognise the different kinds of landmines, what to do if they find them and first aid techniques like how to stop massive bleeding can save lives. This is achieved by Mine Awareness teams visiting communities to convey these important messages using drama, pictures, puppets, song and dance. Children are a particularly important group to target as they often mistake landmines as toys and are particularly vulnerable.

2. Mine clearance
   The task of clearing mines is much slower and more costly than the manufacture and laying of mines. It can cost from $550(NZ) to $1550(NZ) to clear one mine, compared with $5(NZ) to buy it. While paths can be cleared by (expensive) heavy machinery to allow an army to pass, making an area safe for the civilian population requires that every mine be removed.
   Locating the minefields is the first challenge:
   • Maps are rarely available or accurate - mines may be laid and re-laid.
   • Smaller mines shift during flooding.
   • Talking with local people is a key source of information.
   Locating and destroying every mine is even more time-consuming:
   Currently there are no easy ways to locate and detonate mines at a distance or en masse.
   • Many newer mines are plastic and don’t activate metal detectors.
   • Many detectors produce a high rate of false alarms.
   • Sniffer dogs can detect up to 95% of recently laid mines, but require special training and suitable weather and can only work for a few hours at a time.
   • Machines such as flails, rollers and ploughs require firm level ground and do not destroy every mine in a field.
   • Using explosives to detonate the mines causes too much damage to the land, and may displace mines instead of destroying them.
   • The most promising technological solutions rely on electromagnetic impulse, ground-penetrating radar, or infra-red imagery, but these are still being developed and most will be too expensive for widespread use.
   Often deminers must work 40x40cm at a time, using hand-held metal detectors to locate potential mines and then a probing rod and trowel to find and uncover the suspicious object. The work is boring and tiring. Given the slowness of mine clearance, an important decision is which areas to clear first: for example, clearing the approaches to a bridge may restore a whole province’s access to a hospital. Specialist mine clearance agencies such as the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) train local men and women as deminers (some of them are mine survivors).

3. Rehabilitating landmine survivors
   Children and adults who are injured by landmines have physical, emotional, social and economic needs.
   After the surgeons have done their best to repair horribly mangled bodies the survivors need physiotherapy and retraining to cope with loss of eyesight, hearing or mobility. Some need crutches or artificial limbs. The most appropriate prosthetic devices are made locally, because they are cheaper, easier to modify or replace (every few years) and designed to match skin colour.
   While artificial limbs are a visible need, it is just as vital for the person to be assisted to return to as normal a life as possible. Children need to be able to attend school, take part in games or sport, and help with chores. Adults need to earn their own income or help to support the family, but jobs such as farming or fetching water may be very difficult. Providing training in new skills such as radio and television repair helps support mine survivors into adapting to a new life.
   Many landmine survivors say their greatest need is for acceptance by others in their family or community. Changing attitudes about disability is a key part of this process.

4. Advocacy
   While the international ban on landmines is a major achievement, the task remains of ensuring that more countries sign the treaty and that signatory governments honour their commitments. The public can also continue to campaign for appropriate funding of mine clearance and long-term assistance to landmine victims.

This report draws on World Vision Australia’s Landmines Topic sheet and www.icbl.org/resources/problems.html last updated 16.08.99