

Statement on Mine/ERW Risk Education

Mr. President,

Landmine Monitor reporting for 2007–2008 indicates a number of improvements in the implementation of mine/ERW risk education activities, which aim to raise awareness and promote behavior change in accordance with international mine action standards.

In general, the extent of “awareness raising” appears to have increased, and remained the main form of risk education. Landmine Monitor recorded risk education activities in 67 countries and areas in 2007, two-thirds (42) of which were States Parties. Never before has Landmine Monitor identified so many people benefiting from risk education activities. In comparison, this is one million more than in 2006 and represents a two million increase on 2005.

Many risk education professionals may believe that risk education remains an underrepresented component in the mine action world. But does reaching 8.4 million people in 67 countries reflect a “marginal” activity? Should we now feel reassured, knowing that more people than ever are being informed about the dangers of mines and other explosive ordnance? Unfortunately, the answer is NO.

For, although the number of people benefiting from risk education activities remained one of the only quantifiable indicators for this activity, this is no longer seen as the decisive measure of its success. Hard evidence in the form of national data on risk-taking behavior, or statistics on the link between casualty rates and risk education are not readily available. If in many cases the age and gender of casualties, the type of device causing the incident, and activity at the time of the incident are not recorded, how can you define who is at most risk? Sadly, 40% of 5,426 casualties recorded by Landmine Monitor in 2007 were not included in any official data collection system, many more go completely unrecorded.

In the absence of good statistical evidence what can we say about accomplishments under the second component of the risk education definition in the international mine action standards, namely “promoting behavioral change”?

This is much harder to measure. Nevertheless, reporting for the past year showed new or increased risk reduction efforts, such as supporting livelihood alternatives for those taking increased risks for economic reasons. Education combined with appropriate legal measures to discourage intentional risk-taking was used in several states which are not yet party to the Mine Ban Treaty, particularly those affected by cluster munition remnants and the scrap metal trade. Efforts to integrate risk education in the school curriculum—thereby teaching new behaviors to future generations—improved in Albania, Lebanon, Sudan, and Tajikistan.

Overall, however, Landmine Monitor data, as well as country and regional evaluations, indicate that challenges such as economic necessity, illiteracy, and a lack of access to affected communities continue to prevent some of those most in need of risk education from receiving it. There was inadequate risk education in 38 of the countries where risk education was recorded. In addition, even in countries with adequate risk education, operators are forced to play a guessing game based on perceived threat, rather than real risks because of poor data collection.

In conclusion, we can ask again, even though reporting has shown an increase in good practice, does risk education represent a core mine action activity or rather will it be pushed to the margins because of a lack of innovation in seeking to target those most in need.

Thank you for your kind attention.