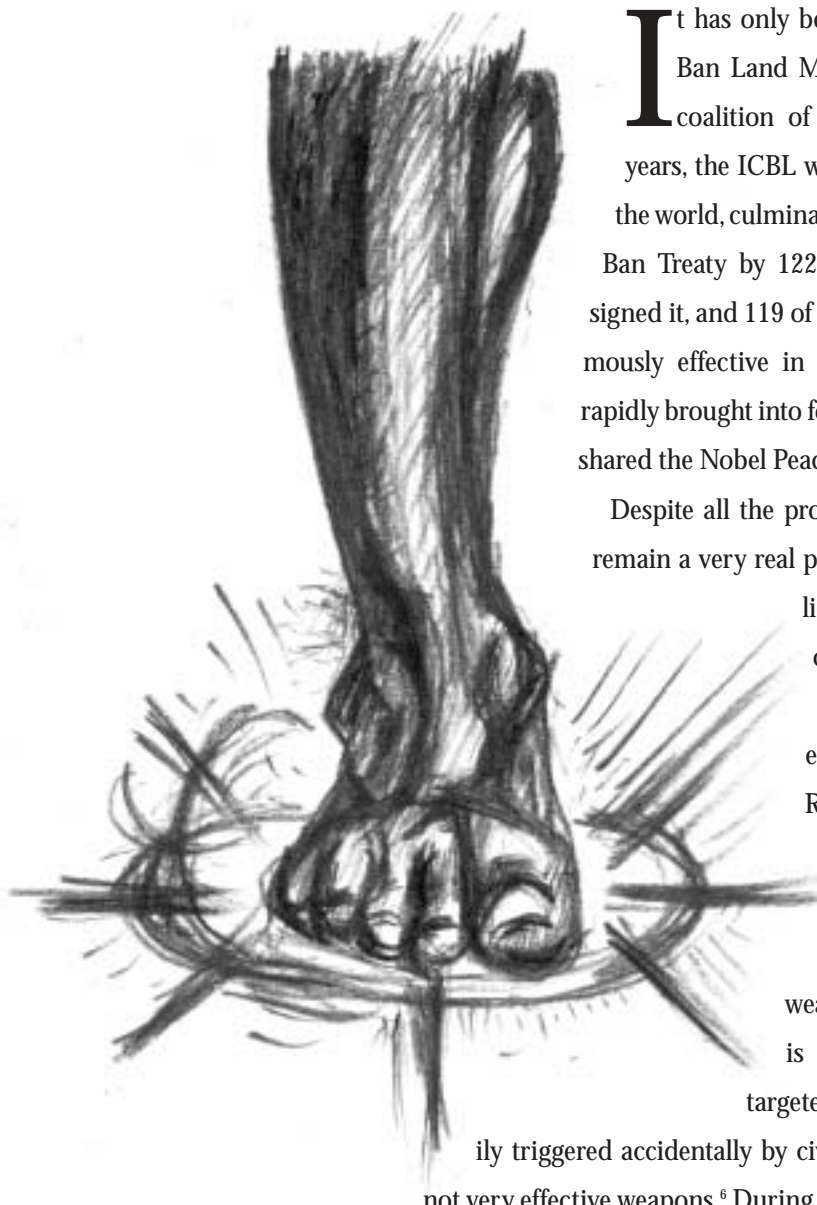


# Land Mines:

## A Humanitarian Crisis, and the International Campaign to Ban Them

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**I**t has only been a decade since the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines (ICBL) was launched in October 1992 by a coalition of nongovernmental organizations. In its first five years, the ICBL won the support of numerous governments around the world, culminating in December 1997 with the signing of the Mine Ban Treaty by 122 countries.<sup>1,2</sup> Since then, 19 more countries have signed it, and 119 of the total have ratified it.<sup>3</sup> The treaty has been enormously effective in the strength of its provisions, which have been rapidly brought into force. In 1997, the ICBL and organizer Jody Williams shared the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Despite all the progress that has been made since 1992, land mines remain a very real problem. There are still an estimated 80 to 110 million land mines in the ground around the world that continue to be used by nonparties to the treaty, and in some cases, signatories.<sup>3,5</sup> At the same time, several major powers including the United States, Russia, and China refuse to sign the treaty.

### **The Nature and Effects of Land Mines**

Land mines are a particularly devastating weapon for several reasons. Perhaps most destructive is their indiscriminate nature. They cannot be targeted at specific individuals or vehicles and can be easily triggered accidentally by civilians. Even during a military campaign, they are not very effective weapons.<sup>6</sup> During the Vietnam War, one-third of injuries sustained by

American soldiers were caused by land mines. A large majority of those were American land mines, exploded when soldiers needed to backtrack through previously mined land.<sup>7</sup> Using land mines in a modern war in which there is a lot of movement is dangerous to one's own soldiers and not particularly effective against enemy soldiers because targeting is impossible.

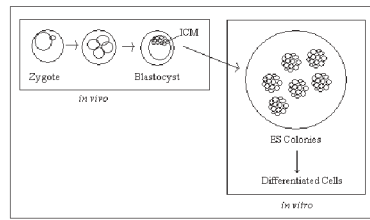


Figure 1



Figure 2

However, it is the impact they have on civilian populations once war has ended that causes the greatest concern. The immediate economic costs of land mines are enormous. While they are cheap to purchase (as little as \$3) and easy to deploy, the cost of removing a single mine averages between \$300 and \$1,000.<sup>6,8</sup> Providing prosthetics and surgery to adult victims typically costs around \$3,000.<sup>6</sup>

Children make up a considerable proportion of land mine victims and die more often than adults from their injuries. They are more vulnerable to land mines because they tend to pick up objects found lying about and often wander off well-known, safe paths. Additionally, their shorter height usually causes more severe injuries from the blast of a land mine because it occurs closer to their vital organs and head.<sup>9,10</sup> Caring for children who have lost limbs is particularly expensive, requiring new prosthetics every six months due to growth. Many child victims of land mines in the developing world receive virtually no medical attention at all.<sup>10</sup>

Although the immediate costs of de-mining and caring for survivors are intractable for the developing world, the indirect and long-term costs, both economic and social, of land mines are far higher.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly, the presence of mines, or even simply the belief that they may be present, inhibits reconstruction and development subsequent to a war. Much arable land may

no longer be safe to use, resulting in impeded economic growth. Mined routes make movement difficult and hinder the return of refugees and soldiers to their homes, the delivery of governmental services such as health care and education, and even the holding of legitimate elections.<sup>5</sup>

The return of refugees, already challenging to a government immediately after a war, is only exacerbated by

land mines. People who return home to find their fields mined may have great difficulty in finding ways to earn income.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, newly returned refugees are unaware of the locations of minefields and thus are likely to become victims. Land mines also lead to continuing militarization, because those most impacted by them often turn to militias for assistance. These groups may further impede the delivery of government services and make de-mining less likely to occur.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, land mines cause ongoing medical problems, beyond those related to caring for the injured.<sup>5</sup> Their presence impedes delivery of basic health services, such as immunization and prenatal care, resulting in even higher disability and mortality rates. Malnutrition also becomes a greater threat with the presence of mines because much land becomes too dangerous to farm and many families lose breadwinners to disability. Paths to clean water are often mined, forcing people to drink contaminated water, which increases the likelihood of outbreaks of diseases such as cholera. Many mines contain heavy metals or toxic chemicals that can affect water and land, resulting in associated health problems.<sup>11</sup> Mines also result in the overuse of land known to be safe, which then renders that land unproductive.

Developing countries depend mostly on agricultural production by rural farmers.<sup>5</sup> As this is the group most severely affected by mines, the economy as a whole suffers greatly. Additionally,

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resources that could be well used in many other areas must continue to be directed to de-mining activities. This also increases dependence on foreign aid. Industries dependent on the presence of trans-

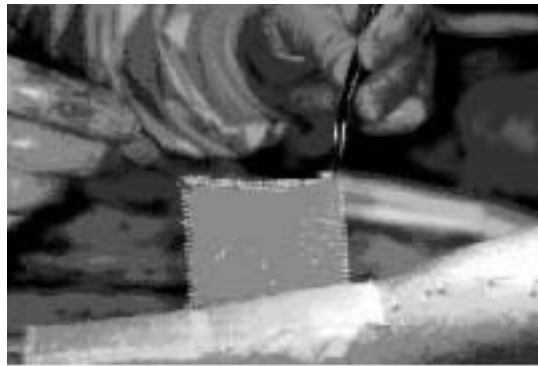


Figure 3

portation networks suffer, and the presence of mines makes tourism less likely. Mines also seriously impact infrastructure, resulting in under-used or inaccessible facilities and great waste of resources. Clearly, mines make it far more difficult for a country to recover from a war, and their impact on civilians is devastating.

## Reasons for ICBL's Success

The ICBL initially consisted of six NGOs—Handicap International, Human Rights Watch, Medico International, Mines Advisory Group, Physicians for Human Rights, and Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation—but grew rapidly to represent well over 1,000 groups from across the world.<sup>1</sup> These groups came together because the work of various NGOs, ranging from environmental to children's rights issues, was being made significantly more difficult by the presence of land mines. The huge numbers of land mines buried throughout the world came to be seen as a humanitarian crisis, not just for the immediate human suffering they caused when exploding, but also for the extent to which they impeded reconstruction and development after the cessation of conflict.

Beyond the strength of the coalition of NGOs, a number of factors contributed to the unique success of the ICBL.<sup>12</sup> Members of the campaign had good cause to believe that the use of land mines was already outlawed by international law, as the weapons do not distinguish between soldiers and civilians. Under the Protocol of 1997 attached to the Geneva Convention, "indiscriminate attacks," defined as those that "are of a nature

to strike military objectives or civilian objectives without distinction," are illegal.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to this legal advantage over opponents to their campaign, the fact that the cold war was over helped

the ICBL to also focus the world's attention on issues of conventional warfare, rather than on just nuclear warfare and disarmament. Without the overriding fear of nuclear war, people were ready to evaluate the types of weapons that had actually been in widespread use, and it became clear that land mines had caused great devastation to civilian populations.


Unlike many grassroots campaigns, the ICBL worked with, not against, the governments they were trying to convince.<sup>12</sup> As a result, governments quickly aligned themselves with the campaign, facilitating the development of a treaty. The dedication of certain politicians, in particular Lloyd Axworthy, was also particularly valuable.

A foundation of strong personal relationships also played an important role, and not just within the ICBL itself. Good personal relationships with government and military representatives helped to build political will for change. The loose nature of the organization was also valuable in providing the flexibility for the campaign to work throughout the world and at many different levels.

The clear-cut nature of the issue was also critical: This was a campaign behind which even members of the military could stand without any compromise of their priorities. While a few countries, most notably the United States, continue to claim that the use of land mines is strategically important, most other countries feel that they are militarily ineffective and that the postwar damage they cause make their continued use inexcusable.

## Obstacles to Complete Success

Despite the overall success of the campaign so far, it has fallen short in certain important respects. Most notable was the failure of the U.S., along with several other major powers, to sign onto the Mine Ban Treaty. The U.S. refused to sign the treaty claiming that it needed to use mines in the demilitarized zone in Korea. It is more likely that its reluctance stems not from the genuine belief that land mines are vital or even useful weapons, but rather from a fear that giving

in on one weapon would pave the way for further, more substantial demands like the banning of cluster bombs that pose threats similar to land mines.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. did indicate that it would sign the treaty in 2006, once it had developed a replacement weapon. However, extensive research has failed to yield any alternatives deemed satisfactory so it appears unlikely that the U.S. will sign onto the treaty by its proposed target date of 2006.<sup>14,15</sup> 

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