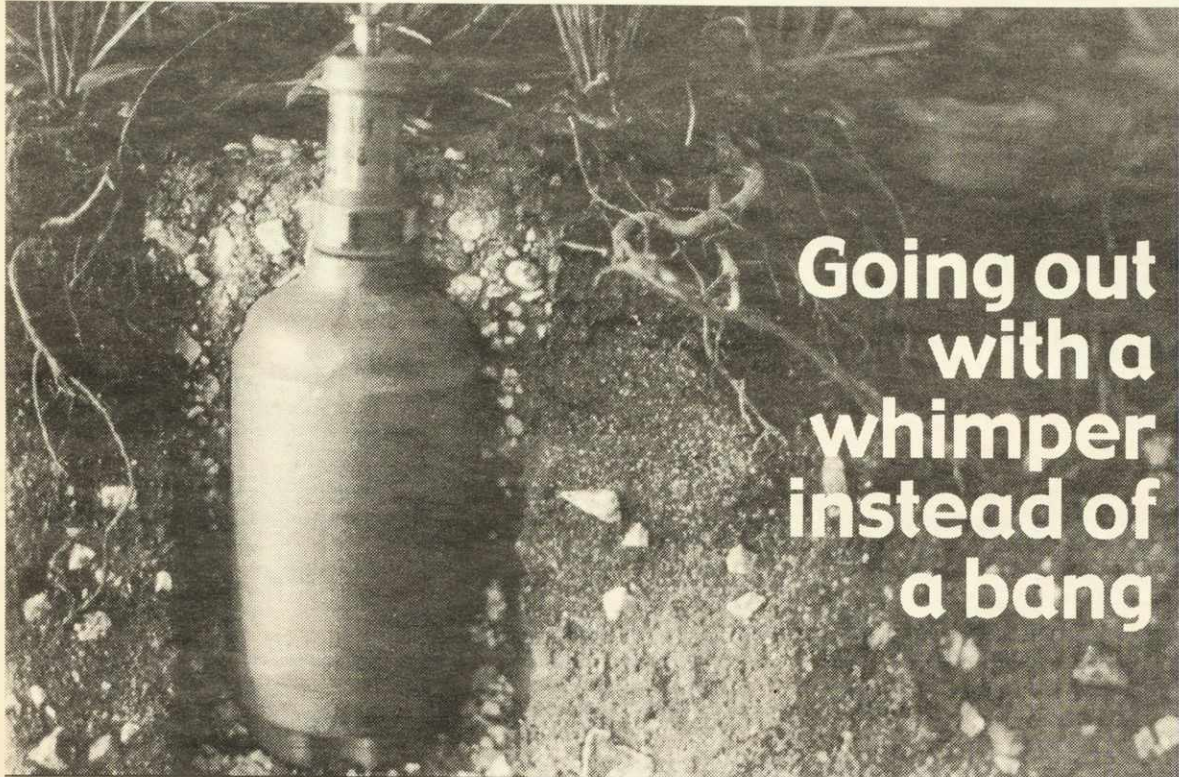


# SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT



## Going out with a whimper instead of a bang

### Day of landmine action — panel discussion

BY DANIEL MCKILLOP

The first ever Atlantic Landmine Exhibition was held as a part of International Days at the Student Union Building on Tuesday, February 8. As a component of the event, a panel discussion was held for approximately two hours, beginning at noon. The forum was moderated by Brian O'Neill, Canadian Program Officer for Oxfam Canada. "Landmine issues must be understood in terms of human

rights, such as protection from violence," said O'Neill. "Areas which are mined can [also] prevent access to water, growing and retrieving food," and a whole host of other restrictions to freedoms of movement and property.

"It was Canadians who made a lot of difference on this issue," said Bob Lawson, Deputy Director and Senior Policy Advisor within the Mine Action Team of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. "Canada took the issue outside of

conventional routes, forming an unusual coalition of small to middle Powers like South Africa, the Philippines, Norway," who signed what is called the 'People's Treaty.'

The coalition worked with civil society organizations, and sent supporters to places where mines directly affected people. Since it was composed in Ottawa in 1997, the People's Treaty has been translated into other languages, including local dialects, and distributed to countries all over the world. Given

the long term damage done by landmines, combined with the hopeless difficulties in regulating their distribution in the world, the Treaty requests the total ban of mine usage, mine production, stockpiling, sale or exportation of the weapons.

"We have been putting pressure on local governments," Lawson said. "Moral voices and political voices are being heard all over the world."

Lawson attributes the success of the treaty to its brevity and elegance. Its initiatives are clear; all mines are to be cleared within 10 years, while existing stock of mines are to be destroyed within four. But support for this treaty is critically needed now, while Canada begins to actively implement it. "This thing will fall apart if the momentum doesn't sustain itself, said Lawson. "The issue has to be taken out of Ottawa, and brought to local regions [of the world]. All Canadians have a stake in this, and have to get involved."

"The U.S. is stubbornly refusing to sign the treaty," said Nathaniel Raymond, media assistant in the communications department of Physicians for Human Rights, co-winner of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. "Landmines affect the civilians of the world, who have lived with this scourge for longer than what [many] governments have acknowledged."

Raymond also stresses the important role that Canada has to

play. If Canadian leaders can persuade the US to sign on, "there will be diplomatic pressure for other countries to sign, where they have not...it is a partnership that we need."

"There is no more of an extreme challenge than sending soldiers into a mine field, knowing that you're responsible for their lives and limbs," said Greg James, a representative of the Canadian Forces School of Military Engineering. James served 21 years in uniform, and lost a soldier to a landmine explosion during Operation Harmony in Croatia in 1994. "We're often there [as Peace Keepers] to separate the fighting sides, not to demine the area."

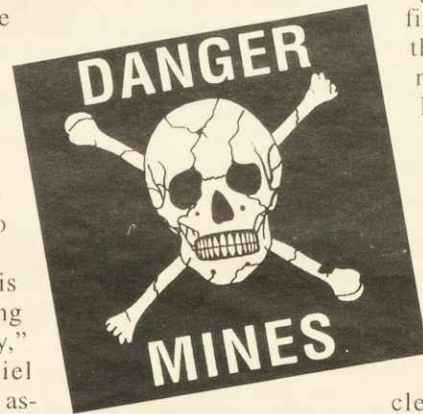
During Operation Harmony, the Serbs and Croats had signed a cease-fire. Because of the large number of landmines in the region, troops had difficulty manoeuvring, and it was decided that the mines would have to be

cleared. On the first day of the cease-fire, the first casualty of the mission was claimed. The Serb engineers took the soldiers down a path, and hit an anti-tank mine. One of the victims of the explosion, who survived, had even helped plant the mine.

"In the end, we declare the route or area mine-free after clearing it, and then we have to go down the unforgiving path, hoping that we did our job, said James. "There is fear before, and after, clearing a mine field. In the evening, when you reach down to take off your boots, you realize you are lucky that on that particular day you turned out all right. Then, when the next day arrives, you have to do it all over again."

Countries which are currently threatened by landmine activity include Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Chechnya, Croatia, Iraq, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Somalia, and many others. More than 50 countries have manufactured millions of anti-personnel landmines over the past 25 years.

At the Ottawa Conference in 1997, 122 countries signed the People's Treaty. Presently, over 135 countries have signed. In addition to banning landmines, the treaty also requests that able countries provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation and social reintegration of mine victims, as well as support mine awareness projects.



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VANCOUVER	-	18:55	-	-	-	-	-
CALGARY	-	18:55	-	-	-	-	-
TORONTO	-	23:25 <sup>1</sup>	13:50	12:10 20:35 <sup>1</sup> 23:35	-	-	-
ST. JOHN'S	-	18:30	-	18:40	-	-	-
HALIFAX DEPARTURES TO USA							
ORLANDO	-	15:50	-	-	-	-	-
ST. PETERSBURG	-	-	06:00 <sup>1</sup>	-	-	-	-

<sup>1</sup> Begins Feb 7 <sup>2</sup> Ends Feb 27

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