

Americas stockpile destruction seminar

On November 6 and 7, 2000, representatives of the countries of North and South America will gather in Buenos Aires to discuss the Ottawa Convention and destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel (AP) mines.

Canada and Argentina will co-host the meeting in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Organization of American States (OAS) Mine Action Unit.

States will gather for two days to discuss their obligations to destroy stockpiled mines within Convention timelines. Experts from the region will exchange information concerning the type and quantity of stockpiled mines, as well as methodologies and experiences in planning for destruction. The group will also look at monitoring, verification, donor assistance and coordination.

Destruction of stockpiled mines is key to preventing the spread of mines, but is technically a complex task. Canada offers technical support to help signatories work to meet their obligations to destroy stockpiled mines.

The objectives of this seminar are to facilitate the goal of a landmine free zone in the Western Hemisphere and compliance with the stockpile destruction sections of the Ottawa Convention. The

seminar is also expected to provide a regional forum in Latin America for debate on best practices and lessons learned in AP mine stockpile destruction.

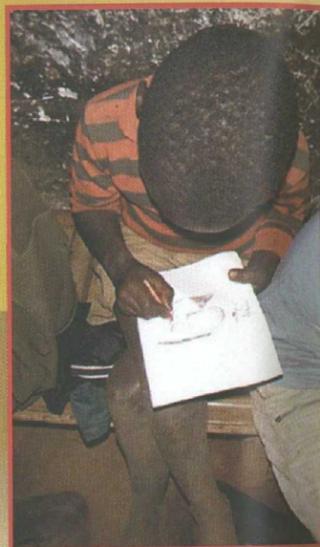
The Americas are poised to become the first mine free hemisphere. All but one of the 34 OAS Member States have signed the Ottawa Convention, and as of August 17, 2000, 26 had ratified it. ●



Charles Whitaker/CIET

ANGOLA

Drawing a picture: How some Angolan children pass on knowledge of landmines to their families.



Charles Whitaker/CIET

WHERE CHILDREN DON'T FEAR TO TREAD: Evaluating mine awareness training in Angola

by Aparna Swaminathan – CIET Canada

In Angola, children who receive mine awareness training pass on vital information about mine risks to family members. But they may themselves be at higher risk as a result of the training.

Through research carried out in collaboration with UNICEF Angola and Canada's Department of

Foreign Affairs Mine Action Team, CIET Canada, a community-based research organization, found that children were more likely to enter a mined area after receiving mine awareness training at school. And, although they knew more about the physical threat of mines, they were no better prepared for what to do when encountering a mine or a minefield.

Children are often the target audience of mine awareness programs because they are at particular risk of mine accidents. Yet they are seldom active participants in evaluations of mine action and have little or no input into the design of materials.

The CIET Canada evaluation of UNICEF's mine awareness programming in Angola focused on children's knowledge and risk-taking behaviour in relation to mines. Conducted in Huila province in the south and Uige province in the north, the research engaged more than 1100 primary school children, their parents and neighbours in 2000 households, as well as school teachers and community leaders in 21 communities. Mine awareness program managers were also interviewed.

The evaluation, completed in March 2000, found that mine awareness materials and messages transmitted information about the

danger of mines and standard mine markings and signs, but they did not encourage 'mine smart' behaviour among children. The educational materials were also difficult to understand for anyone without formal education.

The evaluation recommended ways that awareness programs could be fine-tuned to decrease risk and suit the needs of children. UNICEF Angola facilitated extensive discussion on the findings with mine awareness program managers and school teachers. Ways to improve program delivery and revise curriculum materials are currently being discussed.

Angola has been at war almost continually since 1975 and landmines have been used extensively by several parties that have fought over Angolan territory. According to Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), the largest mine clearance agency in Angola, mines have been laid in all 18 Angolan provinces and over 70 mine types from over 20 countries have been found.

The true extent of mining in Angola is still unknown because of the resumption of war between government forces and UNITA at the end of 1998. According to NPA, "Angola probably rates as the worst mine affected country in the world and arguably the most difficult to clear."

Angola signed the Ottawa Convention on December 4, 1997, but has yet to ratify it. ●

Women's focus group helps evaluate mine awareness education.