

DESTROYING STOCKPILED MINES

Mines are vastly cheaper to destroy when they are still on the shelf than once they have been laid in the ground. The global mine clearance effort will be wasted if these stockpiles find their way into the ground. That is why stockpile destruction is as important part of mine action.

Although the Convention does not enter into force until March 1, 1999, a number of signatory states have either completely destroyed their mines, as Canada did last year, or are in the process of destroying stockpiles, as are South Africa, the United Kingdom, France, Hungary and Belgium. More signatories, such as Namibia, Zimbabwe, Romania, Thailand and Cambodia, are planning stockpile destruction. Even non-signatory states such as Russia, Ukraine and the United States have begun to destroy their mines.

Over 11 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed by 15 countries since the beginning of the Ottawa Process in 1996. These mines will never take a life or limb.

CLEARING MINED LAND

Donors such as Canada, Norway, the European Union, the United States and Japan have mobilized significant new resources to establish programs in Bosnia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Angola, Croatia, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Ecuador, Honduras, Laos, Jordan and Yemen.

Not only has the number of mine action programs increased, but they are also being undertaken more systematically and with better record-keeping. The effectiveness of mine clearance is greatly reduced if it is not done according to priorities and standards, with accurate records, and accompanied by effective mine awareness campaigns. In addition, more resources than ever are supporting technological innovation to improve the speed, efficiency and safety of mine clearance operations.

10 donor countries have initiated 98 new mine action programs in 25 countries in the past 12 months.

We should not judge the success of mine clearance by the sheer number of mines destroyed. The important and relevant statistic is that the highest possible proportion of priority areas – the places where people live and work – are cleared.

Survey work is the best way to ensure that mine clearance resources are dedicated to the neediest places where the impact will be highest. In the last year, a consortium of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) known as the Survey Contact Group teamed up with the United Nations system to establish standard procedures as well as a strategic approach to survey the most mine-affected states as quickly as possible.