

The Military vs. The Humanitarian Cost of Anti-Personnel Mines

Chair: Mr. Stephen Lewis, Deputy Executive Director, UNICEF

The Military Utility of Anti-Personnel Mines

Lt. General (retired) Robert Gard
*President, Monterey Institute of International Studies,
United States of America*

General Gard sought to address the question of whether anti-personnel (AP) mines work from a military perspective. He concluded that they are not indispensable and their humanitarian considerations far outweigh their military utility. In short, anti-personnel mines should be banned.

The principles of "military necessity" and "proportionality" are well established in international law. Military necessity permits reasonable means to be used in order to accomplish military objectives. This is an essential component of the debate on banning anti-personnel mines.

In a recent statement, the US Army's Deputy Director for Strategic Plans and Policy noted that AP mines are a necessity for three reasons: to secure the battlefield, to enhance the effect of other weapons, and to protect friendly forces. Therefore, the US is reluctant to ban any weapon that might save the lives of US men and women in uniform.



But AP mines are an indiscriminate weapon, and we need to examine whether their use is militarily justifiable. A 1994 study conducted by an independent research body concluded that AP mines have "quite modest" military utility in defence operations, and probably "a negative net military utility" in offensive operations. These conclusions were reinforced in a November 1996 paper that concluded that the current use of mines threatens to neutralize US technical military advantages, limit tactical maneuverability and slow the operational tempo of US forces. This was borne out during the Gulf War. As a result, General Norman Schwarzkopf, the former Commander of Allied Forces in the Gulf War, and other retired US generals urged President Clinton to support a ban on AP mines as both a humane and militarily responsible act.

The Human Costs of Anti-Personnel Mines

Mr. Soren Jessen-Petersen
*Director, New York Liaison Office,
UN High Commissioner for Refugees*

"Mines force people to flee, and they further endanger their return," said Jessen-Petersen. Anti-personnel mines are one of the deadliest problems facing refugees: their effects are costly and long lasting, continuing to kill and displace people long after the war that caused them has moved on.

Jessen-Petersen noted that AP mines are often spread for the purpose of displacement, to ensure that "the enemy" is driven out, and to prevent them from reaching safety. Mines can also prevent the delivery of humanitarian services to those most in need, and this forces humanitarian aid workers to take great risks. This is seen by those who lay the mines as one way of maintaining control of refugees.