

The UN estimates that tens of millions of such mines are buried in over 70 countries, and that a further 2 million are still being set every year. These devices, often undetected, kill or mangle some 20 000 people a year. It is estimated that by the end of 1998, even before the Convention had officially come into force, over 11 million mines stockpiled in 15 countries had been destroyed and a new global norm against their use had virtually ended the international trade in these deadly weapons.

Canada is in the forefront of the international drive to get rid of these mines: in December 1997 it created the Canadian Landmine Fund, with a budget of \$100 million over five years. This amount will be used to help several countries conduct mine clearance activities, to provide assistance to victims, to develop new mine-detection and mine-destruction technologies, and to help signatory states comply with the treaty. So far, Canada has made a \$10 million contribution for mine clearance and assistance to victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and another contribution of almost \$3 million for similar programs in seven countries in Central Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Last, nearly \$4 million has been committed for mine clearance and support to community rehabilitation programs in Central America.

Economic and social development

Together with international peace and security, economic and social development forms the most important component of the UN's work in the world. The United Nations believes that there cannot be lasting global peace until all peoples experience well-being. The UN Charter states clearly that the United Nations' principal functions must include promoting higher living standards, full employment, and economic and social progress. The United Nations therefore delivers numerous programs to improve living conditions throughout the world, and commits a very large part of its human and financial resources to these activities.

Three quarters of the world's people are concentrated in developing countries, and it is estimated that 1.5 billion of them are living in poverty. The per capita average annual income in the world's 49 poorest countries amounts to US\$360, whereas it is more than US\$23 000 in the richest 24 countries, or 65 times greater. As the gap is growing, one of the priorities and essential tasks of today is to close it.

To try to do this, the UN has a number of tools, one of which is to hold world conferences that focus on major problems and attempt to identify practical solutions. Over the past 10 years, the UN has organized world conferences on the environment and development (1992), human rights (1993), the correlations between population and development (1994), social development (1995), improving the status of women (1995), human settlements (1996), and food security (1996).



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