

200,000 Landmines Cleared In 2008 (UN)

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- Bomb disposal experts cleared more than 200,000 landmines around the world in 2008, contributing to the progress made in ridding the anti-personnel and anti-vehicle explosives over the past decade, the UN Mine Action Team said.

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"Much has been achieved since the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention entered into force 10 years ago," China's Xinhua quoted the UN team as saying in a statement marking the anniversary of the signing of the watershed treaty, which falls on March 1.

The team, comprised of 14 different UN entities, said it was "greatly impressed and heartened by the steady decline in casualty rates, the return of formerly mined areas to productive civilian use and the destruction of tens of millions of these deadly weapons."

It is estimated that 190,000 anti-personnel and 10,000 anti-vehicle mines were destroyed in 2008, and an increased number of countries, including most recently France, Malawi and Swaziland, have declared completion of their mine clearance operations, UN officials said.

"We applaud the progress made in the struggle against the scourge of landmines," the statement said, reaffirming the team's commitment to assist mine-affected countries, assist victims, destroy stockpiled landmines as well as create awareness on the dangers of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

The statement also urged member states to fully support three pacts signed in recent years aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating the humanitarian suffering and negative development impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

Meanwhile, the statement underscored that the Mine-Ban Convention "is an excellent example of effective collective efforts by states, the United Nations, regional organizations, the NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross aimed at ridding the world of indiscriminate weapons."

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