Africa Landmine Conference Opens Today In Addis Ababa

The second continental conference of African experts on landmines opens today, Wednesday, in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. Africa is the most heavily mined continent in the world, with at least 40 million landmines. It is estimated that landmines kill, injure, and disable over 12 thousand people each year in Africa.

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For more on the extent of the landmines problem in Africa, English to Africa reporter and Daybreak Africa host James Butty talked with Mary Wareham, global research coordinator for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. She says her organization believes that landmines affect 23 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Angola, Chad, and Egypt. Ms. Wareham says many of the mines in Africa are old and that they were probably laid one or two decades ago. But she says they still pose a serious threat because the life span of a mine is about a generation. Ms. Wareham says Africa is extremely important to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. She says almost every sub-Saharan African country except Ethiopia and Somalia has ratified the International Treaty Banning Landmines. Ms. Wareham says while Ethiopia has signed the treaty, it has yet to ratify it. She thinks Somalia has not joined the treaty because it does not have a functioning government.

Ms. Wareham says the African Union has been very important as an organizing force in the fight to ban landmines, including advocating for more funding to clear mines and to assist victims of landmines. Ms. Wareham says the Addis Ababa conference is also important because the first review of the International Treaty to Ban Landmines Treaty is due to take place at the end this year in Nairobi, Kenya. She says African countries with landmines must meet certain deadlines in the treaty before the Nairobi conference, including declaring and destroying their stockpile of anti-personnel landmines within four years. Ms. Wareham says another deadline in the treaty is that governments must remove the landmines within a decade. She says for many African countries with landmines, the deadline is around 2009 or 2010.

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