

## Countries do little to help landmine victims: report (SWITZERLAND)

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**Many countries which have signed the 1999 treaty banning landmines are failing in their obligation to help rehabilitate people wounded by the weapons, according to a report issued on Wednesday.**

(16.09.2009)

The report, by the Brussels-based NGO Handicap International, said two thirds of land mine victims in 25 countries who had lost limbs or suffered other serious injuries felt their governments were doing little to help them. "It is not enough for countries to destroy stockpiles and clear the land. They must also help the people who survive land mine explosions," the humanitarian organization's director-general, Marc Joolen, told a Geneva news conference.

The treaty, which took effect in March 1999, has been signed by 156 countries but not by the United States, Russia and China. It specifically provides for survivors of land mine blasts -- who Handicap International says total hundreds of thousands around the world -- and their families to get comprehensive support to rebuild their lives.

According to the report, a clear majority feel they are not getting this support and are not being adequately consulted by their governments on what their needs are. "Survivors are left to battle discrimination and have to compete with many other vulnerable groups for a limited number of services," Handicap International said. "Despite improvements in medical care and physical rehabilitation, most survivors still have to fall back on their families and friends for support," the organization declared.

Unemployment among survivors is high and 90 percent of those questioned for the report said they believed they were last in the queue for jobs. In Afghanistan, where decades of war have had a major impact, 70 percent of victims were unemployed.

Signatories are gathering for a two-day meeting in Geneva to prepare for a review meeting on the treaty in Cartagena, Colombia, in December.

Norwegian diplomat Susan Eckey, whose country with Canada was a major driving force behind the treaty and who is due to chair the Cartagena meeting, told the news conference she expected it to focus on victim assistance.

The report covers 26 countries, all the scene of civil conflict in which government or rebel forces laid landmines that can remain undetected for years until accidentally touched off.

Apart from Afghanistan, states most seriously affected include Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Mozambique, Sudan and Yemen.

Von: GENEVA, 2 September 2009 (Reuters) --

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