When Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai addressed the regional workshop on landmine disposal which convened here earlier this month, he made it clear that Thailand was ready to become a regional mine action centre for Southeast Asia and that, if further developed, the kingdom's mine action programme would be extended to include assistance for victims and mine risk education.

(13.09.2004)

As such, he told delegates, it would greatly benefit countries in the region, especially in information exchange, personnel and mine detection, dog training, and become a focal point for the production and distribution of prosthetic limbs.

Bangkok (Thailand): This is a worthy goal and it received a qualified endorsement from Susan Walker, an active member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. While supportive of Mr Surakiart's stance, she said she felt Thailand still lacked a serious, concrete and practical action plan, which could set Thailand as a tangible example for the rest of Asia, which was still a dominant producer of this destructive weapon. She believes that without serious commitment by the government and financial support from the international community, Thailand might not be able to fulfill its obligations under the Ottawa Treaty within the next five years.

Her concerns were echoed by landmine victims and NGOs, which pinpointed underfunding as the major problem hampering efforts. The Thai government allocation for mine clearance this year amounts to just over 30 million baht. Mr Surakiart said Thailand plans to seek financial assistance from the World Bank when he meets its president in a few weeks. Aid also has come in the past from Norway and the United States but, because the problem is global in nature, there is never enough money to go round. Well aware of this is the Thailand Mine Action Centre, which bears the brunt of the mine-clearing burden. It has to clear mines from 27 provinces, most of which border Burma, Laos and Cambodia. There can be no justification in this civilised day and age for such terrible weapons of war which claim so many innocent civilian lives. Over the past 55 years, anti-personnel mines have caused more deaths and injuries than nuclear, biological and chemical weapons combined. This is because many victims are alone far from medical attention when they are wounded. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that at least 800 people are killed by mines every month worldwide and another 1,200 are maimed. If a child triggers a mine and lives, he or she will most likely lose one or both legs or arms and sustain serious injuries to the abdomen and genitals. Shrapnel sprayed by the mine can also cause blindness and disfigurement. Not only do these terrible devices cause enormous pain and suffering, they also reap a grim economic and social toll. In addition to the cost of medical treatment, and the expense to families of caring for injured relatives, they disrupt trade and make large areas of agricultural land hazardous to farm, as has happened on our eastern border. Landmines can be cleared, but only laboriously and at tremendous expense.

Getting rid of them, once planted, is a dangerous and highly-skilled task. Unfortunately, Thailand's example has not been followed by all our neighbours, and only Cambodia and Malaysia have signed the pact renouncing landmines. Laos, Vietnam, Burma and Singapore have declined to do so and Rangoon actively uses landmines, as do rebel forces inside that country. A summit to review progress will be held in Nairobi in November. As one of the original 140 signatories to the 1997 Ottawa Treaty outlawing mines and a country which met its commitment by destroying its stockpiles in April last year, Thailand must set an example by stepping up efforts to rid itself of these barbaric devices which kill and maim its citizens. It must also encourage other countries to do the same.

Von: 14 September 2004, Bangkok Post

© 2016 Landmine.de