

Inner City Press Global Inner Cities Report - Mine Your Own Business: Explosive Remnants of War and the Great Powers, Amid the Paparazzi

UNITED NATIONS, April 3, 2006 - On a day when UN envoy Jan Egeland was barred from entering Sudan, Mine Action and Awareness Day events were held in that country, with the involvement of the UN Mine Action Service. The UN Mission in Sudan put out a statement that "Egeland's flight into Sudan was not given authorization to land yesterday" and "the Wali (governor) of South Darfur stated that he strictly opposes Mr. Egeland's visit.

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The Sudanese Permanent Representation to the United Nations in New York further stated that Mr. Egeland would be welcome neither in Darfur nor in Khartoum." Simultaneously, the UN Mine Action Office in Sudan put out a press release entitled "The UN in Sudan Celebrates the First International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action on 4 April 2006." The celebration apparently took place without Mr. Egeland, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator.

A week earlier, UNMAS led a trip to Damazin, Sudan, to which refugees currently in Ethiopia are slated to return. The trip was led by Richard Kollodge, who in an April 3 interview with Inner City Press stated that the government in Khartoum has not blocked the work, at least in South Sudan, of the UN Mine Action Service.

Back in New York, a Mine Action fact sheet was distributed stating that in 2005, three governments used landmines. The fact sheet didn't name them, but a question during the press briefing yielded two of the names: Nepal and Myanmar. In the hallway after the briefing, once the cameras were off, the third name emerged: Russia. In fact, the 2005 report of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines states unequivocally:

"Russia has used mines on a regular basis since 1999, primarily in Chechnya, but also at times in Dagestan, Tajikistan, and on the border with Georgia. Russia has generally argued that its mine usage has been necessary to stop the flow of terrorists, weapons and drugs... Russian forces have used mines extensively in Chechnya since the renewal of armed conflict in September 1999. Federal troops have laid mines around and leading up to bases, checkpoints, commanders' offices, government buildings, factories and power plants; on roads and mountain paths in the rebel-dominated south; in fields running from Grozny to Alkhan-Kalu; in the estuary of the River Sunzha; along various borders. Russian officials have repeatedly claimed that all minefields are mapped, marked, and removed when troops relocate. [Source: report of Deputy Chief of the Military Engineering University, Maj. Gen. A. Nizhalovskii, during a virtual roundtable discussion of engineer equipment in military operations in Chechnya. *Armeyskiy sbornik* (Army collection), No. 6, June 2000, pp. 35-40.] These assertions have been contradicted by statements from both civilians and military officers. In addition to Chechnya, there appears to have been a considerable increase in rebel mine attacks in Dagestan, especially in May-June 2005. According to the Minister of Interior of Dagestan, Lieutenant-General Adilgeri Magomedtagirov, 58 terrorist acts (bombings) have been committed in Dagestan since the beginning of 2005, 40 of them committed in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan. [Russian source]

Some in the press corps wondered not if naming Russia during the on-the-record press conference was a coincidence, given that two smaller (and less powerful) state-users of mines were named. During the briefing, Inner City Press inquired whether the type of cluster munitions most recently in the news from use by the United States in Afghanistan qualify as "mines." No, was the answer given at the briefing by Max Gaylard, the director of the UN Mine Action Service, who added that such cluster munitions are "just as dangerous" and constitute a "next important issue." One wag noted how members of the Permanent Five can contort a debate, leading to fact sheets missing basic facts, and definitions with glaring loopholes.

[See 9 p.m. update below: a cluster bomb answer came after deadline from UNDP: "Cluster munitions are addressed by mine action when they are dropped and become unexploded." Hmm.]

(der Artikel ist eeeeeecht lang, daher hab ich nur den ersten Teil kopiert)

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[<<< zurück zu: News](#)
