The landmine crisis is one of the most urgent and critical crises facing Nepal today. Majority of landmine victims are civilians.

Mine incidents have now been reported in 71 of 75 districts. The far western and eastern part of Nepal, previously not significantly affected, now has more than hundred mines in area, and there are fears that the ongoing conflict in the area may lead to much wider use of landmines. As a consequence, the delivery of electricity and water becomes more sporadic in heavily mined areas. Irrigation systems become unusable. Transportation of goods and services is halted on mined roads and the roads themselves begin to deteriorate.

More than 11 years of the Maoist conflict has left a terrible landmine legacy in Nepal. The landmine crisis is one of the most urgent and critical crises facing Nepal today. Majority of landmine victims are civilians.

Nepal is yet to ratify the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty though incidences of landmine explosions and casualties thereof continue to increase in the country.

Maoist are displaying an increasing readiness to use landmines in attacking army and civilians, as well as infrastructure. They are also using indiscriminate or victim-activated mines. These mines are exempted from the international ban. The Maoists also use ire-detoned pressure cookers packed with explosives to target passing military vehicles. The use of homemade mines by the Maoist has increased with the failure of peace talks and the escalation of the conflict.

Although the use of landmines is restricted by the general principles of international humanitarian law and more specifically by the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, these weapons continue to pose a threat to individuals and communities in Nepal.

Nepal voted in favor of a pro-ban UN General Assembly Resolution 56/24M in November 2001, as it had on similar resolutions in the past. On 8 April 2002, Nepali parliament passed a bill that added the term "landmines" to the definition of "bomb" contained in the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Act.

Clearance of mines could take years but unless landmines are removed and destroyed, they will pose huge ancillary social costs. Now, government should adopt national policies, to immediately prohibit the use, production, import and export of antipersonnel mines. Plans should be formulated and implemented to destroy existing stockpiles of antipersonnel mines as rapidly as possible. Government should also commit to the destruction of emplaced mines as rapidly as possible. All mines removed from the ground must be destroyed, and not retained for future use.

Prevalence of landmines represented a serious threat to peace building activities, including regeneration of agricultural production and thus demining came as the most important challenge for the Nation, which is also important in order to avoid massive casualty rates. Because of the widespread location of mines, the major activities of the rural population which are tilling fields, herding livestock, and foraging or wood and food have become dangerous.

Also, even though casualty and disability rates maintain a high ratio in the country, there is no disability law in Nepal. The battle against landmines must not be delayed and requires commitment at the highest level.

The conflict in Nepal has dramatically exacerbated this situation. The educational component of mine awareness is essential.

Government should make public detailed information about its antipersonnel mine stockpiles and minefields. Resources should be made available to improve data collection and analysis on the socio-economic impact of mines. Policy makers for funding of humanitarian demining assistance should, accordingly, consider at least the above mentioned factors while deciding how to allocate funds in conflict master recovery planning.

Often the mines are scattered in an indiscriminate and random fashion, terrorizing local people. These "silent killers" are laid in the ground, they can remain active for decades.

For individual and community alike many of whom are already living in poverty and insecurity, the impact of landmines is not simply physical, it is also psychological, social and economic.

Local businesses become unable to obtain supplies. Unemployment in those areas increases and the prices for scarce goods go up. In the areas that are dependent upon outside aid for sustenance, the mining of roads can mean a sentence to death by starvation.

Landmines are responsible for depopulating vast tracts of the countryside, affecting crop harvests and interfering with the transportation of food supplies into the cities. People cannot go to their fields, and the ever-present threat of landmines risks livelihoods and creates a huge scare. A lack of understanding of the problem and limited information on the location of the mines are hampering efforts to clear them. All of these limiting factors caused by landmines severely decrease the ability of the country to attract foreign investment which is desperately needed to stimulate the economy and provide a better standard of living for the countrymen.

Poor decision-making may in fact prove disastrous and counter productive in determined scenarios. Mobilizing the public conscience has always been an important factor in gaining support for arms control agreements.

Landmine victims suffer severe emotional trauma. Every effort must be made to limit the environmental destruction caused by mines. Nepali community -whether within the country or abroad-- must condemn the use of landmines in the on-going conflict in Nepal.

We must act together now because landmines are still being laid to wait for us.

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