



Topic Synopsis

1st DISC, Landmines

I. Background of Topic

A land mine is a weight-triggered explosive utilized to damage a target by explosives. These targets may be human or inanimate such as military convoys, vehicles, or equipment. Landmines gain their title from the ancient military strategy, mining. Mining was the practice of digging tunnels under enemy supplies and troop encampments. Initially these mines were collapsed to destroy enemy materials located above, in modern times they were filled with explosives to cause further damage. The use of landmines has been extremely controversial. These weapons do not distinguish between harmless civilian contact and military attack. Landmines will deliver devastating and even lethal blows indiscriminately.

Landmines if left armed may remain extremely dangerous years after a conflict has been resolved. Landmines continue to kill 20,000 people per year in demilitarized zones. These deadly weapons can have detrimental effects on the economies and citizens of newly developing nations. Landmines may block people's access to water, schools, jobs, healthcare, and supplies.

II. UN Involvement

Fourteen United Nations departments, programs, and agencies and funds are actively involved in mine action and removal. These organizations envision a world riden of the threat that landmines pose to individuals and communities. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) includes mine action in global UN peacekeeping efforts. Furthermore the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) coordinates mine action in affected countries, plans disarmament operations, and sets mine-action priorities in the nations it serves.



In 1997 the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer or Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction enacted a ban on antipersonnel landmines. Commonly referred to as the Ottawa Convention, the Convention has been signed by 122 governments in December 1997. Today the treaty remains open for ratification by its signatories and adaptation by those who did not sign prior to March of 1999.

Nongovernmental organizations are highly diverse in their efforts to block the egregious effects of landmines. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) was launched by six organizations in 1992. Currently it enables the cooperation of over 1,300 NGOs which work locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally to ban AP mines. The IBCL was fundamental in the enactment of the International Mine Ban Treaty in 1997.

III. Possible Solutions

The use of landmines should be condemned by all member states. Those who are unwilling to stop the manufacture of landmines should adopt the built-in-time-limited safety switch. After a certain amount of time the mine will simply be unable to detonate. The safety switch could be determined in a number of ways. One mechanism would allow the switch to rust or dissolve by exposure to the elements.

Traditional methods of detecting these almost untraceable mines include electronic mine detectors, sniffer dogs, or probing by a sharp object. These techniques are usually extremely time consuming, ineffective, and dangerous. Aresa Biodetection of Denmark believes that it will provide a less costly and safer way to detect explosives underground. Aresa has genetically modified thale cress plants to change colors from green to red when its roots detect nitrogen dioxide from explosives of a mine. The landmines below may now be safely removed.



Nations who are unwilling to ratify the Ottawa Convention and stop the spread and production of new landmines could be economically sanctioned by an international trade penalty that would eradicate the spread of the problem.

IV. Bloc Positions

The majority of nations believe that landmines pose a threat to security and development. Existing landmines should be disarmed and no more should be created. African and Middle Eastern blocs carry this issue closely. Nations like Afghanistan may have up to 10 people per day killed and maimed in landmine related incidents. It has been said to be the most heavily concentrated area of landmines in the world.

V. Guiding Questions

1. How should 1st DISC encourage the ban on the creation of all new landmines?
2. What types of technologies would be most effective in the safe detection of landmines?
3. Should 1st DISC play any role in aiding civilians who have been badly maimed by landmines?
4. How should nations be encouraged to ratify the Ottawa Convention?