

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY  
FOR MINE AWARENESS  
AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION  
4 April 2008**

The presence of landmines in at least 68 affected countries causes millions of women, men, boys and girls to live in fear of losing their lives, limbs or livelihoods while restricting their freedom to walk safely to work or school, graze livestock and travel to markets.

Although nearly 6,000 people fell victim to landmines and explosive remnants of war in 2007, these numbers are dramatically lower than they were only a few years ago. Each year, mine action programmes around the world are clearing landmines from more than 100 square kilometres of land and teaching more than 7 million people how to avoid danger in infested areas. These efforts have helped reduce casualty rates. Still, the only acceptable casualty rate is zero.

Twenty-four of the mine-affected States that have ratified the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Treaty are approaching their 10-year deadlines to clear anti-personnel mines laid down on their territories or in areas under their control. As States strive to reach this important objective, the threat of new casualties will diminish. And yet the challenge of protecting the rights and well-being of the nearly half a million landmine survivors must be addressed for decades to come.

This International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action serves as a reminder that without proper support, survivors of landmines and explosive remnants of war may face a lifetime of poverty and discrimination, lacking adequate health care or rehabilitation services. Member States, civil society and the United Nations must strive to foster the legislative, social and economic conditions that enable survivors to realize their rights and be productive members of society. Mine action-related assistance integrated into broader efforts to ensure respect for the rights of persons with disabilities will also contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, our common vision for a better world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With initiatives under way to eliminate those cluster munitions that cause intolerable harm to civilians, new international instruments may soon emerge. I welcome all endeavours to end the humanitarian impact of these weapons. Any new instrument should include strong provisions to assist survivors and their families.

On this International Day, I call on States that have not yet done so to ratify all disarmament, humanitarian and human rights law instruments related to landmines, explosive remnants of war and to the survivors of the devastating effects of these devices. Only through the widest possible ratification and full compliance will the international community succeed in preventing new injuries and fatalities while ensuring that victims and their families fully realize their rights.