A Historical Opportunity to Regulate the Uncontrolled Arms Trade

Source: Al-Hayat, 13 October 2006

Remember the excitement nearly ten years ago when the treaty to ban landmines was signed in Ottawa, Canada? What began as a small, grassroots campaign had achieved a legally-binding international agreement to banish the scourge of anti-personnel mines from the planet. This month offers a similar opportunity to tackle the horrific excesses of the arms trade. Later this month, the UN will vote on a resolution to start work on an Arms Trade Treaty, exactly ten years after it was asked to vote on a resolution to support a ban on landmines.

It is vital that governments support this resolution, and demand that the Arms Trade Treaty has human rights at its heart. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons have been controlled by international treaties for decades, yet there is still no comprehensive, legally-binding treaty to regulate sales of conventional weapons, from AK-47s to fighter planes. Landmines are one of the few conventional weapons that are effectively controlled. This is despite the fact that small arms alone are estimated to kill 1,000 people every day, most of them civilians.

In too many conflict zones, I have seen for myself how the easy availability of weapons fuels serious human rights abuses. In Rwanda small arms such as the AK-47 contributed to the scale of the genocide. In Sierra Leone during the civil war, it was clear that the proliferation of weapons had led to an epidemic of rapes and mutilations at gunpoint. And in East Timor in 1999, the militia’s access to guns meant that they were able to terrorize the population and, when the referendum went in favor of East Timorese independence in August of that year, to kill them.

The time for an Arms Trade Treaty has come. The uncontrolled spread of weapons is destroying lives, communities and opportunities around the world. And the problem is getting worse. In the five years since 11 September 2001, increasing numbers of weapons have been supplied to regimes that have poor human rights records in the name of the so-called “war on terror.”

The resolution on an Arms Trade Treaty has been put forward by the governments of Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya and the United Kingdom. In doing so, they have made a bold step which should be welcomed. However, it is vital that the treaty contains references interna- tional human rights law. This is not a legalistic quibble: human rights must be at the heart of an Arms Trade Treaty otherwise it will not prevent arms being sold to human rights abusers; and so it won’t effectively save lives.

The campaign for an Arms Trade Treaty is supported by 20 Nobel Peace Laureates and international groups such as Oxfam International, Amnesty International, and the International Action Network on Small Arms. The Treaty these groups are calling for would be based on a simple principle: no weapons for those who would violate international law. Such a treaty would ban governments from selling weapons when there is a clear risk that those weapons will be used for human rights abuses, to fuel conflict or to undermine development.

There are those who say that an Arms Trade Treaty could never work: that the world’s leading arms producing states won’t sign it or that it won’t make much difference anyway. The experience of the landmine treaty puts the lie to this argument. Several of the world’s biggest military powers still haven’t ratified the Ottawa Treaty, yet it has saved thousands of lives over the past decade. Equally important it has changed the behavior of every government. Very few countries now openly trade landmines as they did before the treaty came into force.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, conflict has killed an estimated 3.5 million people since 1998. There, the UN carries out regular weapons collections, which have found arms manufactured in countries all over the world. Guns made in Belgium, China, Egypt, Germany, France, Russia and the United States have been found in the hands of rebel groups.

The uncontrolled arms trade is a global problem. Every government that manufactures, sells, or trans- fers arms is involved. Those governments may not see the devastation their weapons sales cause, but we must not turn a blind eye. The civilian populations in areas of conflict - notably women and children - are crying out for a global solution to this global problem.

Land mines

MU professor joins fight

Source: Kansas City, 14 October 2006

A University of Missouri-Columbia researcher has been tapped to help in global efforts to find and safely detonate unexploded land mines. Dominic Ho, MU associate professor of electrical and computer engineering, is working with the U.S. Army, private defense contractors, and researchers from the University of Florida and Duke University. As part of a $500,000 contract with the Arms, Ho is working with ground-penetrating radar to scan the surface for underground objects. A university report on the project said Ho’s research is focusing on eliminating false detections, which are caused mainly by metal debris, plant roots and buried rocks.

The Integrated Demining Capacity (IDC) teams of the MACC deployed to Sector West, Badme area and Sector Centre, Tserona area continued area clearance operations. The Route Clearance Team also deployed to Sector West, within the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) conducting road clearance operations in the Shambiko area. The teams cleared an area of 119127 sq. m. and 61.2 kms of road in the area.

The Integrated Demining Capacity (IDC) and the Route Clearance Team (RCT) have completed demining operations in Badme and Shambiko area, respectively. Presently the RTC team are conducting operations around Adhagaryag (Ethiopia), Sector Centre.

The PODD, Field Operations Associate, Operations coordinators of the MECHEM and KENDEM conducted an inspection to the newly tasked minefield near Weldensy Mine. In their deployment the Field Operation’s Associate gave a briefing to the coordinators concerning historical back ground and perimeter of the minefield and assisted sitting the proposed area where the new IDC camp is to be located.

In the aftermath of 10 months of deployment, as many as 1,969 UXO and 4 AP mines have been destroyed by the EOD team, Bangldeshi and the MECHEM contractors. The IDC teams and the Road Clearance Operations cleared an area of 2,751,010 sq.m. and 1,786 kms of road area, in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ), respectively.

The UNMEE MACC staff in Sector Centre together with the support of police, United Nations Military Observers (UNMO), UN military units and local authorities of Sub Zone Tserona in Senate received 11 UXO items in Egri Mekel, 5 UXO items in Tserona town, 1 item in Keih Ke- whi and 9 UXO items in Afelba.

The Quality Assurance (QA) team deployed to Tserona area together with Sector Centre Operations Associate to conduct QA inspection of the MECHEM IDC team in Sector Centre, Egri Mekel Minefield and investigated mine incident that occurred in Tserona area.

The new arrived Kenyan Demining contingent members conducted inspection of Weldensy Mine field in Sector Centre. The team will start operations in the coming week.

Mine Risk Education

The Mine Risk Education (MRE) Team of the MACC deployed to Sector West, Sub zone of Lay-Gash and conducted MRE briefings for local people, mainly children, from different age groups and gender 395 people received MRE awareness training.

The Mine Risk Education (MRE) cell in Asmara conducted MRE training to 198 UNMEE military continental members.

The MALO Addis conducted MRE briefings for five new United Nations Military Observers (UNMO) from Sweden, Greece and Austria.

The MACC conducts MRE Briefings for all newly arrived UNMEE Personnel, including civilians and UN Military Observers (UNMOs). All interested in the MRE Briefings can contact Lt.Col. Muchai Kaburu on Ext 2114 at the MACC to arrange MRE Briefings.

The MACC also conducts two MRE Briefings per month for all other newly arrived UN agencies and NGO personnel in the Sector Centre area. The Briefing is held every second and fourth Friday of the month at 15:00hrs at the MACC Conference Room. Contact UNICEF if you wish to attend the Briefings.

Students Participating in an MRE Session.
Word of the Week
On the last issue of the weekly update we posted an article on mine action emergency. This week we will see threat monitoring.

Mine Action Emergency
PART TWO – THREAT MONITORING
A critical element in the ability to respond effectively to emergency situations is the ability to forecast when such a response will be necessary. As mines and ERW are a product of armed conflict, mine action emergencies often become evident well before the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, it may well be possible to initiate some activities prior to any peace agreements being signed. The aim of threat monitoring is to generate accurate information that can be used to inform the planning process, and therefore enhance the ability to deploy a timely and appropriate response.

The Conduct of Threat Monitoring
Threat monitoring involves maintaining a global watch on potential flashpoints or areas of concern. Threat monitoring may entail regular meetings, teleconferences or other contact between the members of the wider mine action community, in order to keep abreast of developments and to share information. This is a continuous process and relies on good cooperation between multiple agencies. Sources of information include but are not limited to:

- a. Governments of mine-affected countries,
- b. Mine action operators,
- c. UN agencies, including Country Teams and regional offices of UN agencies,
- d. Relief / Development NGOs,
- e. ICRC,
- f. Affected populations, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, locals living in the affected area(s),
- g. Protagonists (including Non-State Actors (NSAs)),
- h. ICBL and Landmine Monitor, and
- i. Various other sources of information, such as news media, foundations and academic institutions.

UNMAS will be the focal point for mine action threat monitoring and will maintain contact with a wide range of agencies to facilitate the exchange of information. Within UNMAS the focal point for threat monitoring is the Planning Officer, who reports to the Chief of Programme Support Section.

Threat Monitoring Reports
UNMAS will compile a Country Profile for those countries which have a mine or ERW problem and which do not have a known mine action programme (UN or National). This profile will serve as the foundation for contingency and/or operational planning. The information gathered may be incomplete but will nonetheless assist in determining the extent and type of any potential mine action response, and will help develop relationships within the country and with interested parties, in advance of any mine action response. In order to keep the members of the IACG-MA and SCMA informed, UNMAS will produce regular Threat Monitoring Updates. The updates will present a broad assessment of the level of risk, or threat, presented by landmines and ERW in mine affected countries. These will be distributed at the regular meetings of the IACG-MA and SCMA. The reports will be stored and accessible on the E-Mine database.

Triggers for the Commencement of Planning
Certain developments or events may trigger the need for the commencement of contingency or operational planning. Such “triggers” are:

- a. An outbreak of armed violence or conflict, involving the use of mines or munitions likely to result in the presence of ERW,
- b. The collapse or failure of a existing national mine action programme (or components of it) prior to the completion of mine/ERW clearance in a country,
- c. The sudden movement or forced repatriation of a refugee population into an area known to be contaminated with mines/ERW and where the existing national capacity is unable to cope with the increased need for mine action,
- d. A change in the mine action situation within a country which may be beyond the capacity of the national institutions to deal with.

Source: http://www.mineaction.org/docs.asp?o=1

Map Requests: UN agencies who would like to obtain standard maps of Eritrea, including maps at scales of 1:50,000, 1:100,000 and 1:250,000 are requested to contact the UNMEE Geo Cell at Ext. 6845 or 6971. Maps with specific information relating to areas with mine/UXO can also be obtained from the MACC Information Section upon prior written request on agency letterhead. For further information contact Yonatan Solomon on Ext 2137.