

Landmines: reason for flight, obstacle to return

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Burma/Myanmar has suffered from two decades of mine warfare by both the State Peace and Development Council and ethnic-based insurgents. There are no humanitarian demining programmes within the country.

It is no surprise that those states in Burma/Myanmar with the most mine pollution are the highest IDP- and refugee-producing states. Antipersonnel mines planted by both government forces and ethnic armed groups injure and kill not only enemy combatants but also their own troops, civilians and animals.

There is no systematic marking of mined areas. Mines are laid close to areas of civilian activity; many injuries occur within half a kilometre of village centres.

Although combatants have repeatedly said that they give 'verbal warnings' to civilians living near areas which they mine, no civilian mine survivor interviewed by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines reported having had verbal warnings.

Much work needs to be done in advance of any return of IDPs or refugees in order to map and mark mined areas, educate returnees and control return movements. The reality is, of course, that thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of IDPs will return home whenever they think it may be safe to do so in order to secure land and rebuild their lives. No organisation can stop them from doing so.

Humanitarian organisations must encourage a moratorium

on new use and insist that all areas be marked, in a similar and unambiguous way, by all combatants, and that civilians with knowledge of mined areas of the country should be trained to do this now. This will have both a preventative and an awareness-raising impact, and will help reduce to the lowest possible level the number of casualties that will inevitably occur.

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The Burma landmines report is at <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/burma.html>.