

# Humanitarian mine action and peace building: exploring the relationship

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**ABSTRACT** *Focusing on the humanitarian mine action (HMA) sector, this article argues that rooting peace building in concrete activities carries considerable promise, diversifying the repertoire and enhancing the robustness of peace building. However, the assumption that mine action necessarily contributes to building peace is problematic and permits the neglect of harmful effects and a failure to capitalise fully on the potential for positive ones. If peace building is seen in terms of three major domains—security, development and politics—the current tendency is to emphasise security primarily, development secondarily, and the political only marginally when addressing the impact of HMA on peace building. Several examples indicate that mine action may have a significant impact on the political aspects of peace building, including confidence building, conflict resolution and reconciliation. At the same time, linking mine action to peace building creates certain dilemmas, and a rigid subordination of mine action initiatives to a centrally directed peace building strategy is unlikely to be productive. Ultimately, a focus on the peace building role of mine action carries a dual promise for the sector: it documents impacts that are currently unacknowledged, while encouraging new and refined practices.*

That humanitarian mine action (HMA) contributes to the building of peace is a commonly held view. The ways and means by which it does so, however, have been poorly explored. The assumption that mine action contributes to peace building merely by default often exempts us from asking the more difficult questions, such as when or why its impact may be negative. Most mine action practitioners are aware that their activities have an effect on conflict and peace, and some may even view peace building as the most important issue when setting priorities and implementing projects. All the same, the peace building impact of HMA is not systematically developed, a point that will be exemplified here by revisiting the policy statements of major mine action donors. As this exploratory piece will illustrate, a systematic analysis of the relationship between mine action and peace building has a twofold effect. On the one hand, it documents the peace-building impacts of mine action as currently practised—impacts that are often unacknowledged and sometimes even unintended. On the other hand, it provides a basis for further refining the role of mine action in peace building, with a focus on the implications for policy and practice.

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While this article focuses on mine action, it has implications beyond that specific sector. The typical sequence in fostering peace is seen as first reaching a political settlement between parties to the conflict, then going on to address more concrete problems. An alternative approach, however, is to use the response to concrete problems such as landmines as a way of opening up for the settlement of a conflict. As several commentators have pointed out, this means moving towards the political core of peace building through addressing concrete problems rather than addressing the politics of the conflict directly—essentially ‘depoliticising’ the politics of peace building. While the landmine issue has specific traits that, in part, define its peace-building potential (a point to which we will return later), it also has a lot in common with other concrete problems that affect societies seeking to recover after armed conflict.

In the following we will look first at the concept of peace building before briefly revisiting the mine action sector. Then, distinguishing between various domains of peace building—security, development and politics—we will discuss the potential peace-building impacts of mine action, illustrating these with reference to a variety of empirical cases. Finally, we will address some of the principal dilemmas that may arise from a more explicit linking of mine action with peace building, before offering a few concluding remarks.

### **Peace building**

The term ‘peace building’ was originally introduced in 1992 by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his *Agenda for Peace*.<sup>1</sup> The term was developed as a contrast to peace making, peacekeeping and preventative diplomacy; hence its use was limited to post-conflict measures. Boutros-Ghali’s report was established as an inventory of postwar needs and existing international resources, and came to include any type of activity aimed at restoring normalcy in war-affected societies, including diplomatic, military, economic and humanitarian efforts. The primary focus was on mandates and activities, rather than on inherent dilemmas or ultimate objectives.<sup>2</sup> The peace-building concept that followed was a broad one, yet it was too vague to offer much in terms of guidance for the implementation of complex operations in volatile environments. Similarly, its vagueness undermined its utility as an analytical concept that could guide research.

An approach that stands in contrast to that of the Boutros-Ghali report has been to start with a fundamental analysis of the factors—social, economic and political—that have led to the initiation of and fuelled a conflict, often referred to as ‘root causes’. The emphasis here is on diagnosis rather than activities. However, as Elizabeth Cousens has pointed out, this approach has its own problems.<sup>3</sup> The decisions made by the main intervening actor—the so-called international community—are largely the outcome of political bargaining, not social science analysis. Furthermore, the social science community is largely incapable of establishing the extent to which various structural causes contribute to conflict. Ultimately, even if we have a sensible diagnosis that outlines the root causes of a particular conflict, addressing these root causes may no longer be the most appropriate course of action in a post-conflict scenario, as the whole context

may have been transformed by the conflict itself and new causes may have entered the picture. Nonetheless, this approach eliminates the assumption that an activity is inherently peace building and inspires us to ask the fundamental but difficult questions about when, why and how a particular activity does (or does not) contribute to the building of peace.

At a more practical level, however, building peace continues to be the overarching objective of international interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings, including those whose primary objective is to deliver a narrowly defined service such as mine action. Somewhat detached from the more theoretical debate referred to above, the attention paid to peace building has led to a convergence around a set of assumptions:<sup>4</sup>

- Peace building must address issues within various domains, ultimately aiming at a fundamental transformation of society and its institutions. (In this article, we will classify the domains in which peace-building impacts may be pursued within a threefold division—security, development and politics—and will argue for the primacy of the latter.)<sup>5</sup>
- Peace building may take place before, during or after the conflict, and is an enduring process rather than a time-limited event. Moving beyond Boutros-Ghali's limitation to post-conflict contexts only, this also implies an ability to tackle both the full-scale setbacks and the low-intensity conflicts that follow many settlements. In response, interventions need to be sufficiently robust to be sustainable despite shocks and setbacks.
- Peacebuilding is the consequence of an activity (an outcome or process), not the activity in itself. All activities in conflict settings have the potential both to 'do harm' and to 'do good', and it is only through appropriate and ongoing analysis of the situation and the likely effects of an intervention that the chances of 'doing harm' can be minimised.<sup>6</sup>
- Societies in conflict possess their own 'capacities for peace'—individuals, networks, organisations, and values and norms that are the key resources of peace building.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, under the right conditions, even apparently destructive forces may be converted into constructive forces for peace. It follows that the focus of peace building may be at a variety of levels, ranging from the local, via the national, to the international.

In general terms, the peace-building concept has developed as a contrast to the traditionally more narrow emphasis on conflict resolution. It focuses as much on ordinary people and their living conditions as on the interests of belligerent groups and their leaders. Yet, reminding ourselves that no activity can have a peace-building impact by default, we may argue that the core activities of peace building are those aiming at the fostering of workable political solutions. Peace building, then, is first and foremost about defusing violent conflict or preventing its re-emergence, in large measure by building capacities and institutions for non-violent conflict resolution.<sup>8</sup> It follows that the issues that constitute the core of peace building are fundamentally political. Activities that aim to contribute to peace are also potentially contentious, given that the aim is to modify the ways in which politics is conducted, and will easily be seen by conflicting parties as altering the power relations that exist between them, and hence their oppor-

tunities for future influence. While it is a truism that all external assistance is inherently political, although often unintentionally so, peace-building efforts must be political at heart.

### **Humanitarian mine action**

Until the late 1980s, when the first humanitarian programme was started in Afghanistan, dealing with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) was exclusively a military enterprise. In becoming a key activity of the humanitarian response to many war-torn countries, mine action activities became civilianised, with nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and the UN as the key actors, although these continued to rely on expertise drawn from the military. The term ‘humanitarian mine action’ was in large part coined to capture the realisation that emerged during the latter half of the 1990s that HMA ought to be closely integrated with other activities aimed at helping societies to recover from armed conflict and instigating development, and that there ought to be closer relationships between the various components within HMA.

In general terms, HMA includes all organised efforts to mitigate the effects of, or eliminate, landmines and UXO. In the latest version of the UN’s Mine Action Standards, HMA is described as consisting of five general components:<sup>9</sup>

- mine-risk education;
- de-mining, including surveying, mapping and marking;
- victim assistance, including rehabilitation and reintegration;
- advocacy to stigmatise the use of landmines;
- stockpile destruction.

In spite of its short history, mine action today stands out as a highly professionalised and thoroughly regulated sector, with its own set of international standards and organisational and personnel capacities that may respond at short notice, all overlaid with the principles and obligations vested in the 1997 Landmine Convention.

There has been, and still is, considerable controversy as to the orientation of the mine action sector. Critics claim that the sector is overly focused on the technicalities of clearing mines, that it has had limited ability to learn from and interact with colleagues in other domains of international assistance, and that the sector needs to widen its perspective in order to maximise scarce resources. As some of this critique has become part of the mainstream, in part thanks to initiatives such as the 1997 *Guidelines for Mine Action Programs from a Development-Oriented Point of View* (also known as the Bad Honnef Framework), mine action practice has gradually changed.<sup>10</sup> Today, considerable attention is paid to tailoring responses to variations in context, along with impact assessment and co-ordination with other sectors.<sup>11</sup>

### **Mine action as peace builder?**

The 1999 revised version of the Bad Honnef Framework firmly established the mine action sector as one component within the larger context of peace building.

It stated that mine action programmes should be integrated within ‘a national and local peacebuilding and development framework’. It went on to suggest concrete ways in which mine action might support peace building, including promoting reconciliation (through the participation of diverse social groups), securing transparency (by involving civil institutions in all aspects) and helping to bring about awareness of collectively suffered injustice (through ban campaigns).<sup>12</sup>

If we revisit these issues today, however, what we find is that mine action and peace building remain poorly integrated. In order to get a sense of this issue at the policy level, we have taken the 10 largest donors within mine action and reviewed all available policy statements on both peace building and mine action.<sup>13</sup> Generally, we find that the majority of the peace-building statements make reference to HMA, but the emphasis is primarily on the security aspects, secondarily on the developmental aspects, and only marginally on the political aspects of peace building. For the HMA policy statements, four out of the seven to which we have had access make no reference to peace building, while the remaining three draw attention to peace building either through the use of one specific example or one specific mechanism. While we will return to these policy statements later, we can already conclude that the link between mine action and peace building is generally acknowledged, but poorly developed.

Mine action, however, has considerable potential for peace building. Not only do landmines have grave concrete effects on people’s daily lives, they also carry huge symbolic significance as an expression of war. The perception of landmines as an illegitimate type of weapon seems to be widely held by ordinary people, as typically expressed by a farmer in Afghanistan: ‘A mine is an unseen weapon. Nobody knows where the mine is placed. It explodes suddenly and kills people in a cowardly fashion’.<sup>14</sup> This man, like many others we have interviewed in mine-affected communities, had no conception of an international campaign against mines or a Landmine Convention. Yet he firmly believed that landmines were illegitimate weapons. The existence of an international treaty and its related institutions, together with the intuitive view held by most people that landmines are illegitimate, provides a strong foundation for rooting peace building in mine action interventions. From the viewpoint of parties to a conflict, for example, a decision to support the ban on landmines carries a double promise of stimulating both popular support at home and goodwill abroad.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time we need to be aware that war-making parties may still view landmines as an essential weapon that cannot be dispensed with. There has been a tendency to discuss landmines in the ground as ‘remnants of war’, without problematising their possible perceived function as ‘instruments of war’. This is relevant not only in situations in which a conflict is ongoing, but also in situations in which parties to a conflict still lack full confidence that war will not re-erupt.<sup>16</sup>

In such situations landmines remain an active weapon, and conflicting parties may continue to feel a sense of ‘ownership’ of the mines. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it means that parties to the conflict will be hesitant about any component of HMA, including not only a ban on the use of landmines, but also de-mining (which may remove minefields offering protection to strategic sites or territory) and information gathering (which will reveal to outsiders

sensitive facts about the presence of landmines, and about which locations are seen as sufficiently important to warrant landmine placement).<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, it also implies that the potential gains in relation to peace building are great, since committing parties to support HMA will in part depend on establishing confidence that peace is not reversible.

If we begin going through the records of mine action, we find ample evidence of how its peace-building potential has been realised in practice—although this is only occasionally explicitly acknowledged. Drawing on a number of empirical illustrations and taking the threefold division introduced earlier—that is, security, development and politics—as a starting point, we may outline some of the mechanisms by which mine action can make an important contribution to peace building. The ambition here is neither to pre-empt all options nor to move towards standards for response. Rather, the objective is tentatively to establish a rationale for mine action as a peace builder, which may ultimately trigger debate and stimulate new practices.

### *Security*

In standard inventories of peace-building activities, mine action is normally listed as part of the security domain, alongside issues of disarmament, demobilisation and security sector reform.<sup>18</sup> As argued above, however, the relationship between a particular activity and peace building is most fruitfully approached by analysing the extent and type of peace-building impacts that a particular activity has, rather than by taking its peace-building aspect for granted and sorting it into a particular domain. When donors tend to place mine action in the security domain, this may be because there is a tendency to think in terms of activity rather than impact. Nonetheless, mine action may significantly play into key objectives of a security character.

In a direct sense HMA contributes to disarmament. It contributes to a general reduction of the arms arsenal, addressing a particular type of weapon that has grave indiscriminate effects. Most importantly, it does so through the ban placed by the Landmine Convention on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, with the obligation placed on state parties to destroy stockpiles being particularly significant. Indirectly, however, the systematic clearance and destruction of landmines planted in the ground also contributes to disarmament, preventing the future use of re-circulated mines. Interestingly, when confidence in the peace process increased in 1997 in Mozambique, this also led to de-mining agencies being entrusted by locals to destroy stores of small arms and ammunition.<sup>19</sup>

Demobilisation of fighters, a critical component in post-settlement peace building, has often been closely linked to the setting up of mine action capacities. Given the coincidence of, on the one hand, a need to find meaningful employment for demobilised fighters and, on the other hand, the assumption that military competence is well suited to mine action, this seems obvious. In the Afghan context, it has been argued that, by providing alternative employment to men who had largely been engaged in the anti-Soviet war of the 1980s, the mine action programme prevented their recruitment by armed groups in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, in post-Taliban Afghanistan, several actors, including the government, have argued that as the mine action programme doubles its capacity by taking on 5000 more staff members, this should be linked directly to demobilisation.<sup>21</sup>

Preventing deaths and injuries and reducing the fear instigated by landmines remain important issues. While this lies beyond a traditional state-centric concept of security, it lies at the core of the new 'human security' concept. For many the essence of the landmines campaign has been its redefinition of what was traditionally seen as a security and disarmament issue: it is now primarily seen as a humanitarian issue, giving rise to the new so-called human security paradigm.<sup>22</sup> Lloyd Axworthy, former Canadian minister of foreign affairs and a key advocate of human security, suggested at one stage that peace building is about building human security.<sup>23</sup> From the vantage point of 2003, even though the human security concept has in part expanded on the traditional way of viewing security, it has not replaced it.<sup>24</sup> The way in which landmines cause death, injury and fear to civilians, however, is increasingly seen as a security issue, and it is most certainly an issue whose resolution substantially contributes to building peace.

### *Reconstruction and development*

While the effort to address the landmines problem has first and foremost been driven by a humanitarian concern for the victims of mines, the trend from the latter part of the 1990s has increasingly been to see mines as an obstacle to reconstruction and development. This trend has led to new methods of impact assessment, and to demands for integrating mine action more closely with other sectors of humanitarian assistance. It is therefore not surprising that the chief mine action donors increasingly emphasise the domain of reconstruction and development when addressing the link between peace building and mine action. In donor policies, as well as in most other documentation on the subject, however, the mechanism suggested is the most general one: mine action contributes to development; development contributes to peace. While this may be true in a broader sense, there has been a growing realisation that the relationship between development and peace is a complex one, and that this relationship may at times also be negative.

Nonetheless, it is now a commonly held assumption that landmines constitute a major obstacle to development. Landmines block access to vital resources, including land, water, housing, public buildings, infrastructure and transport routes. While the selection of the types of resources to make accessible is important, the process by which priorities are set may be equally important for peace building. As long as mine action is key to opening access to scarce resources, it is likely that priorities will be subject to public scrutiny and criticism. It is therefore important that priorities are set in a legitimate and transparent manner in order to reduce the potential for tension; this will ultimately also serve as a model for good governance. This is why the Landmine Impact Surveys that visit all mine-affected communities in a country and rank them according to predefined criteria are potentially so important.

If peace building is the primary ambition, some resources will be more

important than others. Since most current conflicts take place within rather than between states, peace building implies a rebuilding of the state and its institutions. Consequently, people's faith in the state's ability to deliver necessary resources in a just manner hinges on gaining access to institutions, schools, clinics and hospitals, as well as administrative bodies and organs of justice. Somewhat related may be the need to ensure that all groups are brought on board the peace process. This may include groups that live in isolation within a country, as is the case in Angola with regard to some of the areas that have been controlled by the forces of Jonas Savimbi's União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA). It may also include groups that have been driven from their homes, living as internally displaced persons or refugees. In the large UN peace operation in Cambodia in the early 1990s it was seen as pivotal to repatriate refugees in time for elections, in order to ensure their involvement in the political process. However, since many of the border regions and areas of return were seriously affected by mines, and de-mining capacities were literally non-existent, the costs in terms of deaths, injuries and coping problems for returnees were enormous.<sup>25</sup> While the instinct to repatriate the refugees may have been sound, the eventual costs of repatriation far outweighed its peace-building gains.

Ultimately, if we aim to maximise the impact of mine action on peace building within the domain of reconstruction and development, this may significantly affect priorities for mine action, particularly in the volatile phase of transition from war to peace, which may often last for several years. As important as the priorities, however, are the ways in which decisions are made: since mine action represents the key to freeing up vital resources, transparency is of the essence.

### *Politics*

While it has here been argued that peace building is political at heart, it is in the political domain that the relationship between mine action and peace building has been explored the least, whether in donor policies or in the literature at large. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that the link is insignificant, nor even that it may not be given considerable attention when operations are being managed in the field. Yet, given the potential for mine action to have a significant impact in the political domain of peace processes, its marginal representation is conspicuous. It may be in this domain that a further analysis would yield most in terms of redefining, and possibly reorienting, the impact of mine action. Here, we will limit our analysis to a focus on three key issues within the political domain—confidence building, conflict resolution and reconciliation—with no claims to be exhaustive.

Confidence-building refers to the gradual building of mutual confidence between parties and securing their commitment to peace. Building confidence is crucial at all stages of conflict settlement, from the initial stage, where it is a precondition for the commencement of negotiations, to the late post-conflict stages, where it remains important to prevent the resumption of violence. It is particularly in the earlier phases—where parties may be hesitant to give up mines, since they effectively see them as instruments of war—that mine action



can play an important role. Access to clear landmines, along with the systematisation of information about their whereabouts, may be an extremely sensitive issue, yet mine action organisations are often successful in their attempts to secure such access, sometimes even when a conflict is still going on. In Sudan an initiative to collect information on the landmines problem has emerged since 2001, with representation from both sides to the conflict. The Sudan Landmine Information and Response Initiative (SLIRI) was set up to establish mine action preparedness (collecting information and building capacity), and to foster 'cross-conflict' dialogue and agreement on the need for a mine action response.<sup>26</sup> As of May 2003 de-mining is about to be initiated in the Nuba Mountains, where a local ceasefire agreement prevails, with units from both sides working jointly on the project.<sup>27</sup> The negotiation of access for mine action, while sometimes conceived merely as a precondition for securing access, hinges on successful confidence building between parties to the conflict, and if clearance begins to yield positive results with no setbacks in the form of renewed hostilities, confidence will grow.

Mine action may also serve as a foundation for conflict resolution. The problem of landmines, if and when acknowledged by all parties to the conflict, may serve as a fruitful starting point for the development of joint solutions. At times, mine action managers may engage in pure conflict-resolution missions in order to be able to start de-mining or other types of projects. At other times, it may be representatives of the parties to the conflict or external facilitators who identify the landmine problem as a promising focus for negotiations. A recent example comes from Sri Lanka, where the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) agreed to de-mine the key Highway A9 that links the Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the country. The two sides de-mined different sections of the road, meeting at an agreed middle point. The opening of the road was a concrete signal of newly gained confidence, and it was widely referred to in various Sri Lankan media as a breakthrough in the peace process.<sup>28</sup> Based on a mutual agreement between the parties, it may prove to be an instrumental step in a longer conflict-resolution sequence. A different example comes from Cambodia, where land disputes led to the setting up of so-called Land Use Planning Units (LUPUS) in some provinces.<sup>29</sup> These units deal with the clarification of land rights and take part in the prioritisation of land for de-mining. The LUPUS work closely with the national mine action authority, but are part of the regular civilian administrative structure and, once in place, their activities extend far beyond clarifying the ownership of de-mined land.

Mine action may also be instrumental to reconciliation, a key component of the effort to tear down old divisions and make it possible for parties who may have been involved in serious atrocities to live together. Generally, co-operative activities and processes of transitional justice are the primary mechanisms here, and mine action may contribute to both. Mine action may contribute to reconciliation directly, for example when former adversaries work side by side in a programme, as in the Sudanese example mentioned above. Similarly, when local populations identifying with one group realise that those coming to clear mines in their community belong to another, this has the potential to defuse tensions at the popular level, as discussed in a 1998 impact-assessment report

from Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> Another avenue to a reconciliatory impact is when a former party to the conflict is engaged in clearing mines, effectively being seen by the population to be removing the instruments of war. This effect is presumed to have occurred in Guatemala, as well as in several other Latin American countries, when the military was allocated the task of clearing mines. Finally, if mine-education activities incorporate rights issues and reflect the international instruments aimed at protecting civilians, this contributes to building awareness of social injustice more generally.

Mine action, then, has a contribution to make to peace building that goes well beyond the impact that it has through improving security or through facilitating development and reconstruction. Mine action programmes may also have a major effect on peace building's political core.

### **Dilemmas**

However, even if mine action has a large and untapped potential for peace building, there are also reasons why one should proceed cautiously in expanding on the opportunities that exist. In the following, we will address some key areas of concern. A general concern that underlies all the following dilemmas is one that has been raised by several people who commented on the ideas in this article at an earlier stage: by making explicit the potential for mine action to play a political role in peace building, one risks defeating the purpose, since it is exactly the ability to 'depoliticise' the landmine problem that gives mine action its potential.

At the most basic level, an explicit peace building engagement may increase the risk to HMA personnel and organisations, which may come to be seen as political actors, and hence also as targets. As of mid-2003 this has been raised as a concern in Afghanistan, where it is believed that recent attacks against mine action personnel are linked to a perception that mine action organisations work closely with the US-led coalition forces. While the Afghan peace process, vested in the war that deposed the Taliban, may be a special case, most peace processes will nevertheless entail controversy, and all types of intervention have political effects. Mine action is no exception: it seeks to eliminate an instrument of war, must often collaborate with belligerent parties, and works to free up disputed resources. However, while it is true that a conscious political role may increase risk, it is equally true that neglecting the political impact of interventions will be dangerous: to locals, to mine action personnel and to the larger peace-building process of which mine action should ideally form an integral part.

In addition, if mine action is used as a means of reintegration or reconciliation in relation to individuals or organisations that have been guilty of abuses during the war, this may be perceived as rewarding the perpetrators, and thus as unjust, by the larger population. A parallel has been the criticism of awarding de-mining contracts to firms or organisations that have been involved in producing or placing mines—what came to be known as 'double dipping' in the mid-1990s, when South African arms companies entered international mine action.<sup>31</sup> In a national context, however, the parameters may be different. Reconciliation in the aftermath of deep and protracted conflicts hinges on finding alternatives to formally

penalising each and everyone who may carry some guilt, often offering ways and means of rehabilitation that are acceptable to the individual but also legitimate in the eyes of society at large (including earlier victims). Leaving the political and economic gains of clearing mines to earlier warmongers may be a small price to pay if it can be used to bring on board potential spoilers of a peace process, and if it can be used to rehabilitate people who may otherwise feel left out.

A different objection may focus on the risk of blurred aims and goals. Over its short history, mine action has already moved from a simple focus on victim reduction, and it currently includes a variety of objectives, not all of which are necessarily in harmony with each other. Adding a new set of objectives—and particularly the rather abstract objectives connected to peace building—may complicate things further. A variation on this argument is the concern that mine action is slowed down as a result of subordinating mine action decision making to the logic of the peace process. In Mozambique, following the 1992 peace agreement, mine action was placed under the Ceasefire Commission, a joint body made up of representatives from the two parties that had been involved in the earlier conflict. The Commission's capacity to reach decisions was hampered by internal conflict and distrust, as well as by what a 1997 UN report called a 'crowded peace agenda'.<sup>32</sup> This points to the need to ensure that HMA does not become hostage to one centrally directed peace-building process. One reason that HMA has such potential for peace building is precisely that it is a specialised sector, where the focus is on one particular type of problem. In parallel with the development of the peace-building concept throughout the 1990s, there has been a politicisation of international aid, with various forms of conditionality becoming the order of the day. Mine action has in part been shielded from this, being defined as humanitarian assistance on account to its life-saving character. Hence, in Afghanistan, where most other activities contributing to reconstruction and development were frozen during the latter years of Taliban rule, the mine action sector stayed operational. In order to benefit from the peace-building potential of mine action, we must adopt the view that peace building benefits from parallel alternatives, something that has been described as a multi-track approach. We know that peace-building is a difficult activity, and that as a rule any peace process will suffer setbacks. Using concrete activities to keep multiple tracks open, with various foci and stakeholders, should make peace building more realistic, and more robust.

None of the dilemmas raised here are particular to mine action. Rather, these are the fundamental dilemmas that confront any sector of international assistance in conflict or post-conflict situations. There will be situations in which the most sensible option is to say that a close linking of mine action to peace building is unlikely to have a positive impact on peace, but is very likely to affect mine action negatively. In most situations, however, a closer linking will significantly add to the positive impact of mine action, while enhancing the repertoire of peace building, as well as its robustness.

### **Concluding remarks**

Mine action practitioners are certainly not blind to political impacts. As the

examples referred to above amply illustrate, practitioners routinely assess the conflict dimensions of their interventions. Undoubtedly, mine action has considerable impact on peace building. The absence of a precise understanding of the peace-building role of mine action, however, has a dual effect. On the one hand, the current role of mine action as a peace builder is not sufficiently acknowledged. On the other hand, we remain poorly equipped to expand on the role, despite its massive potential. A more precise account of the principles and mechanisms by which mine action contributes to building peace should take existing experience as its primary reference. This article is intended only as a preliminary exploration.

Humanitarian mine action, like any other sector operating in conflict settings, needs to focus more strongly on building the capacity to analyse its impact on conflict and peace, and to ensure that the resultant analysis is used to improve existing practices. A minimalist approach is to aim at preventing negative effects of interventions. In the cases above, however, where a peace-building impact has effectively been sought, as in Sri Lanka and Sudan, the peace-building potential of mine action has proved to be great. In other cases, there may have been similar opportunities, but these have not always been capitalised upon. While strong arguments remain for not subordinating all mine action to a centrally co-ordinated peace-building operation, organisations and personnel will have to increase the attention they pay to the impact of their activities on peace. They will need to become equipped not only to assess the impact of interventions on conflict, but also to respond to any opportunities for enhancing peace that arise.

At the most general level, returning to how we perceive peace building, one tendency is to see the core political activities, such as confidence building, conflict resolution and reconciliation, as having mainly to do with communicating and re-establishing a sense of dialogue. We have here argued that there is merit in focusing on solving concrete problems. In coming together to develop solutions to the landmine problem, parties emerging from a conflict have a concrete focus for their dialogue, one where there are real differences of opinion, where they will inevitably have to work their way towards trusting in peace, and where progress in mutual understanding can be demonstrated through solid results. The same goes for a variety of concrete issues to be settled during or in the aftermath of armed conflict. Dealing with landmines offers great potential, while being but one example of this process.

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## Notes

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pdf/mbc/SC\_may03/speeches\_mc/PRIO\_MC.pdf (9 July 2003). We are grateful to Wenche H Hauge, Richard Lloyd, Christian H Ruge and one anonymous referee for comments.

- <sup>1</sup> B Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping*, New York: United Nations, 1992.
- <sup>2</sup> E M Cousens, 'Introduction', in E M Cousens & C Kumar (eds), *Peacebuilding as Politics: Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp 1–20.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> The following section draws on J Goodhand & D Hulme, 'From wars to complex political emergencies: understanding conflict and peace-building in the New World Disorder', *Third World Quarterly*, 20 (1), 1999, pp 13–26.
- <sup>5</sup> See D Smith, 'Europe's peacebuilding hour? Past failures, future challenges', *Journal of International Affairs*, 55 (2), 2002, pp 441–460. Smith includes a fourth aspect—reconciliation—that will here be subsumed under the political domain, given that it is closely linked to the rebuilding of political institutions. Similarly, the challenge of rebuilding trust—and the distinction between politics and reconciliation—appears to be more a question of levels (national vs local) than about distinctly different types of issues.
- <sup>6</sup> M B Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—or War*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> M B Anderson, *Do No Harm: Supporting Local Capacities for Peace Through Aid*, Cambridge, MA: Collaborative for Development Action, 1996.
- <sup>8</sup> Cousens, *Peacebuilding as Politics*.
- <sup>9</sup> United Nations Mine Action Services (UNMAS), 'International mine action standards (IMAS)', UNMAS, 2001, at <http://www.mineactionstandards.org/>.
- <sup>10</sup> German Initiative to Ban Landmines, *Mine Action Programmes from a Development-Oriented Point of View* ('The Bad Honnef Framework'), Frankfurt: Medico International, 1997.
- <sup>11</sup> K B Harpviken, A S Millard, K E Kjellman & B A Skåra, 'Measures for mines: approaches to impact assessment in humanitarian mine action', *Third World Quarterly*, 24 (5), 2003, pp 889–908; and K E Kjellman, K B Harpviken, A S Millard & A Strand, 'Acting as one? Co-ordinating responses to the landmine problem', *Third World Quarterly*, 24 (5), 2003, pp 855–871.
- <sup>12</sup> German Initiative to Ban Landmines, *Mine Action Programmes from a Development-Oriented Point of View* ('The Bad Honnef Framework'), Berlin: German Initiative to Ban Landmines, 1999, at [http://www.landmine.de/fix/BH\\_English.pdf](http://www.landmine.de/fix/BH_English.pdf), accessed 13 June 2003.
- <sup>13</sup> The 10 largest donors to HMA in the period 1994–2001 were the USA, the European Community, Norway, the UK, Sweden, Japan, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. See International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), *Landmine Monitor Report 2002: Executive Summary*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002. We have obtained peace-building policy statements for nine out of 10 (the Netherlands' is missing) of these, and HMA policy statements for seven out of 10 (Japan, Canada and Germany missing).
- <sup>14</sup> Interview by Kristian Berg Harpviken, Herat, Afghanistan, 1999.
- <sup>15</sup> The fact that most current wars are civil wars, with many of the parties being non-state, means that joining the treaty is unrealistic in many cases. There remains the option of issuing statements that one will comply with the treaty, as the Taliban of Afghanistan did in 1999, but this is unlikely to be as significant in terms of international exposure and encouragement. Some have also expressed concern that governments may be joining the treaty prematurely, without having the institutional capacity and the necessary support to comply. Angola may be such a case, signing the Landmine Convention in 1997 but continuing to use landmines at least until 2002.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, R Eaton, C Horwood & N Niland, 'Study report: the development of indigenous mine action capacities', New York: United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, 1997.
- <sup>17</sup> Some emergency de-mining in particular locations may not be critical, but once the process of systematically mapping the mine problem in a larger area has started, one also gathers what is sensitive information, given that mines tend to be placed in strategically significant locations. The mapping of minefields may even draw attention to strategic locations that others were not previously aware of.
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, M Leonhardt, 'The challenge of linking aid and peacebuilding', in L Reyhler & T Paffenholz (eds), *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001, pp 238–245.
- <sup>19</sup> A Vines, 'Disarmament in Mozambique', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 1998, pp 191–205.
- <sup>20</sup> Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA), 'Socio-economic impact study of mine action operations Afghanistan: interim report', Islamabad: UN Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, 1998.
- <sup>21</sup> Afghan Interim Administration, 'National development framework (draft)', Kabul: Afghan Interim Administration, 2002.
- <sup>22</sup> L Axworthy, 'Towards a new multilateralism', in M A Cameron, R A Lawson & B W Tomlin (eds), *To Walk Without Fear: The Global Movement To Ban Landmines*, Toronto: Oxford University Press,

1998, pp 448–459.

- <sup>23</sup> See J M Beier & A D Crosby, 'Harnessing change for continuity: the play of political and economic forces behind the Ottawa Process', in Cameron *et al*, *To Walk Without Fear*, pp 269–291.
- <sup>24</sup> The Human Security Network pursues this agenda. Described as a collaboration between 'like-minded states', it includes Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, The Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and Thailand, with South Africa as an observer. See <http://www.humansecuritynetwork.org>, accessed 1 June 2003.
- <sup>25</sup> A Law, *Hollow Success: The Repatriation and Reintegration of Cambodian Refugees*, Issues in Global Development, 7, Melbourne: World Vision, 1995.
- <sup>26</sup> SLIRI, 'The Sudan landmine information and response initiative (SLIRI)', presentation made to the meeting of the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Awareness and Related Technologies of the Landmine Convention, Geneva, 5 February 2003, available at [http://www.gichd.ch/pdf/mbc/SC\\_feb03/speeches\\_mc/SLIRI.pdf](http://www.gichd.ch/pdf/mbc/SC_feb03/speeches_mc/SLIRI.pdf) (8 July 2003); and ICBL, *Landmine Monitor Report 2002: Toward a Mine-Free World*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002.
- <sup>27</sup> Interviews with Hassabo Mohamad Abud Elrahman, Humanitarian Aid Commission, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Abu Osama Abd Allah Mohamed, Sudanese Association for Combating Landmines, and Christian Larsen, Danish Church Aid, Geneva, May 2003.
- <sup>28</sup> See, for example, 'The politics of the A9', *Daily News* (Colombo), 14 February 2002; and 'Paving the path to peace', *Sunday Times* (Colombo), 22 February 2002.
- <sup>29</sup> ICBL, *Landmine Monitor Report 2002*.
- <sup>30</sup> MCPA, 'Socio-economic impact study of mine action operations Afghanistan'.
- <sup>31</sup> K B Harpviken, 'Landmines in Southern Africa: regional initiatives for clearance and control', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 18, 1997, pp 83–108.
- <sup>32</sup> R Eaton, C Horwood & N Niland, 'Mozambique: the development of indigenous mine action capacities', New York: United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, 1997.