

A new call to arms on landmines



WCPT is building on its long-standing concerns about the devastating effects of landmines by developing a policy statement calling for a ban on their production, sale and use.

Covering the consequences of armed conflict, landmines and other weapons of war, the statement will aim to raise awareness about the issues surrounding weapons of war, how they crucially affect physical therapists, and the stance that the profession takes on their manufacture and use.

“WCPT member organisations have an important role to play in giving voice to the issues, and working towards national legislation to support a ban on landmines and cluster munitions and action to clear them,” says WCPT Secretary General Brenda Myers. The new statement will provide them with a tool to put their case to governments and other national bodies.

WCPT has taken a stance against landmines, and their devastating effects on civilians and those involved in conflict, since passing a motion at the 14th General Meeting in 1999. This stated that WCPT would encourage all member organisations to call on their governments to ban and clear landmines.

The consequences of armed conflicts, landmines, and other weapons of war such as cluster munitions presents important global health and development issues. Worldwide, an estimated 10,000 people, mostly civilians, lose their lives every year as a result of landmines, and many more thousands are left with disabilities. Another 55% of the victims may die before receiving assistance, and those who survive require on average 2.6 surgical operations each as well as long-term rehabilitation.

Landmines are having a particularly devastating effect on civilians in

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Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia, Mozambique, Laos, Vietnam, Colombia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Angola records the highest number of amputees in the world, due to mine problems. In Colombia, there is a new landmine victim every nine hours, one in three a child.

In societies where the welfare system is poor, there is a massive socio-economic burden for people with disabilities resulting from weapons of war. In mostly agrarian countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Mozambique the loss of even one limb makes it difficult to carry out normal daily economic activities. In addition, psychologically these victims are perceived, or perceive themselves, as being a burden on their families and communities, and often resort to begging to survive.

With at least 8,000 new cases of physical disability occurring annually, rehabilitation poses a major challenge. As well as physical disability and psychological effects, indirect disabilities may also result from landmines – for example, if their presence prevents nutritious food being accessed, iodine deficiency disease, malnutrition and water-borne diseases can result.

No More Landmines: <http://www.landmines.org.uk/>

International Campaign to Ban Landmines: www.icbl.org/

International Council of Nurses (2006) Position statement: Towards Elimination of Weapons of War and Conflict:
www.icn.ch/PS_E14_Towards%20Elimination%20Weapons.pdf

