



United Nations Development Programme

Communications Office

# PRESS RELEASE

## **REMOVING LAND MINES IS CRITICAL FOR LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, UNDP'S TAFT TELLS NAIROBI SUMMIT ON A MINE-FREE WORLD**

**Nairobi, Kenya, 2 December 2004**—Heavily land-mined countries like Afghanistan and Angola will never fully develop without the removal of these lethal weapons, warned Julia Taft, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of UNDP's Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Recovery, speaking at the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World today.

The eradication of land mines and assistance to victims should be considered both a humanitarian imperative and an investment in the future, Taft stressed.

“The land mine problem is a critical development issue,” she said. “The terrible human toll taken by these indiscriminate weapons is compounded by deep and lasting economic damage. Millions of mines still in the ground mean that there are hundreds of roads that cannot be travelled, thousands of acres of farmlands that cannot be tilled, and entire communities that are deprived of health care and education and essential investment.”

The Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World has drawn participants from 144 state parties to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, 15 observer countries, the United Nations, the World Bank, plus many individuals and non-governmental organizations committed to the eradication of landmines. Summit participants are reviewing progress made toward a mine-free world over the past five years and preparing an action plan for the future.

More than 80 countries around the world suffer some degree of landmine contamination, and 35 are especially severely affected. Since 1975 there have been more than a million direct landmine casualties, most of them civilians who were killed or injured long after conflicts had ended.

“These are indiscriminate weapons that do not distinguish between enemy combatants, farmers at work, or children at play,” said Taft, whose bureau supports extensive mine action\* programmes in 27 countries around the world (<http://www.undp.org/bcpr/mineaction/index.htm>).

“Many people have also suffered and died because of the indirect but equally lethal impact of landmines as an obstacle to development,” Taft said. “Landmines restrict access to water and keep schools and hospitals and roads from being built. They prevent the safe return of refugees and the internally displaced. They breed instability in fragile post-conflict environments, and terrorize entire populations.”

Taft pointed to several heavily mined countries that have now made mine action an integral part of their development plans and budgets, including:

- **Afghanistan**, where de-mining employs a full-time work force of 8,000, is now completing a national landmine impact survey.
- **Angola**, with a newly created National De-Mining Institute and a US\$16 million national budget allotment for mine action.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, which is enacting a national plan to rid the country of all land mines by 2010.
- **Cambodia**, where de-mining has been adopted as a ninth national Millennium Development Goal, and a mine-risk education effort is reducing the incidence of land-mine victims.

Taft urged other severely affected countries to follow suit, and called upon the international community to “mainstream” mine action into their own assistance plans.

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*\*Mine Action is the generic term for a range of services associated with addressing the landmines issue including: clearing land and returning it to productive use, destroying stockpiles, treating the physical and psychological needs of landmines’ survivors and reintegrating them into their communities as full productive members. UNDP supports national capacity development in mine action in 27 countries and plans to establish programmes in six additional countries in 2005. UNDP has trained more than 500 senior and mid-level mine action managers and has conducted mine action exchange programmes among six affected countries to share lessons learned and strengthen the international mine action network.*

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