

PRESS RELEASE

21st October 2003



Landmines in Trafalgar Square: Massive event on 1st November

The Event

For the first time in the UK and following the Pyramid of Shoes in Baghdad last June, Handicap International UK will be building a Pyramid of Shoes on the 1st November 2003 in Trafalgar Square. Each shoe will symbolise the lives and limbs lost as a consequence of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Members of the public will be asked to bring along a pair of shoes, showing their solidarity to the 'Stamp Out Landmines' day.

Marking the start of the Landmine Action Week, the purpose of the event is to raise awareness about landmines and raise support for the 'Clear Up' campaign; a recent campaign headed by Landmine Action, to bring about new international regulations on munitions such as the notorious cluster bomb. In addition to the pyramid, Handicap International deminers currently working in Kosovo will be on hand to do demonstrations on mine clearance and mine-risk education. Equipment and methods will be described to the public.

Handicap International UK will be exhibiting 'Mine Toons' - cartoons collected throughout the world from various national newspapers - and 'Mined Earth'- the amazing work of five prestigious female photographers. A number of other entertainments, such as street performance music and children animations, will be on offer.

Handicap International France generated the idea of the 'Pyramid of Shoes' 9 years ago, and similar events are since being held across Europe with increasing success. One was also held in Baghdad on the 13th June 2003 to inform Iraqi about the dangers of unexploded ordnances.

The Landmine Issue

Today, more than 90 countries remain affected by antipersonnel mines. Buried invisibly in the ground, not only do they pollute old battle fields, but also paths, fields, village access points and the areas surrounding essential water sources. Their exact number is impossible to establish.

Even today, with the highly successful International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the Ottawa Treaty, ratified by 135 countries and signed by 147, an estimated 8,000 people fall victim to landmines every year and are either killed or seriously injured. Many victims, often children, are killed immediately. Without access to immediate medical care, many more die within hours or days. The majority of those who survive the explosion undergo at least one amputation and have to overcome complications due to a multitude of perforating fragments that have entered the body. The psychological trauma is immense and adds to the suffering and difficulties faced in physical recovery and social readjustment.

Handicap International and the other NGOs of the ICBL are reiterating their call to the International Community to publicly condemn states that endorse these weapons, prohibited by three-quarters of the world's nations. The United States, Russia and China are among those that have not yet signed.

Notes for Editors

Handicap International is an international NGO working in 55 countries worldwide. Its mission is to provide support to disabled people, landmine victims and vulnerable populations. It is a co-founder of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which was awarded the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

International Campaign to Ban Landmines: www.icbl.org. Clear Up campaign: www.clearup.org

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