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At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as Eco 92, countries made a commitment, which was included in **Agenda 21**, to protect the environment even in times of armed conflict.

**Principle 24** – *Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development, as necessary.*

### MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



# WEAPON CONTAMINATION

## DESTRUCTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUFFERING AMONG THE POPULATION

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Unexploded munitions and abandoned weapons in town and countryside kill and maim people, cause psychological damage, degrade the soil, pollute the water and destroy wildlife. Their socioeconomic and environmental consequences are disastrous. **Unless we tackle weapon contamination, sustainable development will not be possible.**

### THE ICRC AT RIO+20

During the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is warning of the grave consequences of weapon contamination – a human, social, environmental and economic tragedy that affects both countries that have undergone recent conflict and countries where wars ended decades ago.

To respond to this tragedy, States must adopt and implement the relevant treaties on International Humanitarian Law (IHL). And it is vital to reduce risk and prevent accidents.

Those taking part in Rio+20 and the general public are invited to visit the ICRC **stand at Athletes' Park**, in Barra da Tijuca, where they can see a photo exhibition. Printed materials and videos are also available. The stand will be open from **June 13 through 24**, Monday through Friday from 11 to 7 and on weekends from 10 to 7, except on June 20, 21 and 22. In addition, the ICRC will give a presentation on the issue at a side event, during Prepcom III (Preparatory Committee), on **14 June at 1.30 p.m.**, in **room T-5 at Riocentro**.

### WHAT IS WEAPON CONTAMINATION?

- It is the contamination caused by:
- **unexploded munitions** – the so-called explosive remnants of war: grenades, mortars, artillery shells, cluster munitions, bombs and rockets;
  - **abandoned weapons**: unmonitored or unsecured stocks of munitions;
  - **mines** (whether improvised or manufactured industrially)
  - and the **proliferation of small arms and light weapons**.

Weapon contamination deprives whole populations of access to water, farm land, health services and education. In addition, it hinders humanitarian work, making it impossible to bring help to those who need it most.

### WHAT EFFECT DOES IT HAVE?

As it can kill and maim people, weapon contamination has serious **humanitarian consequences**. For communities in the countryside and in cities, abandoned or undetonated weapons of war are a menace that prevent them from resuming normal life even after an armed conflict has ended.

Surrounded on all sides by items of ordnance and munitions, many people are unable to move about. This is the case in Libya, where explosive remnants of war are preventing people from returning to their homes and delaying post-conflict reconstruction.

Another problem is the lack of access to water and food and the inability to go to school or attend health centres or hospitals.

**Environmental consequences** include:

- **soil degradation**;
- **water pollution**;
- **the destruction of wildlife**;
- **reduced biodiversity**
- and **an imbalance in the food chain**.

Climatic change and natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes and floods aggravate a community's vulnerability by scattering mines and explosive ordnance.

### WHAT DOES THE ICRC DO?

The ICRC runs explosive ordnance disposal programmes, prevention campaigns, assistance programmes for victims (guidance for them and their families, war surgery, psychosocial support and physical rehabilitation), alternative projects for communities in contaminated areas, and economic reintegration in many communities faced with the consequences of weapon contamination.

In 2011 the ICRC supported **92 physical rehabilitation projects in 28 countries and territories**, benefiting more than **222,000 victims**. It also coordinated socioeconomic reintegration programmes for people with disabilities in Cambodia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The organization took preventive mine action in **27 countries or contexts**, providing expert guidance, training and technical know-how for government mine-action bodies, supporting National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the running of activities, working to mobilize and persuade government and other actors to provide effective mine-action inputs, or undertaking clearance activities. The ICRC was the first agency to deploy survey and explosive ordnance disposal teams in **Libya**, dealing with over 6,000 items of ordnance in 2011 and 2012. In **Iraq**, as the only body carrying out activities to remove pieces of unexploded ordnance in Missan province, in the south of the country, the ICRC destroyed some **1,600 undetonated explosive remnants in 26 communities**.