

The reality of landmines

By Kerry Maze and
Jolyn Campbell
(co-chairs of Wusc)

Wednesday, Oct. 1, our local WUSC committee (World University Service of Canada) had the honour of presenting guest speaker Sharon Carr to a very touched crowd. Sharon, an orthotist at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, travelled independently to Vietnam intending to focus on patients with cerebral palsy for a three month period. Over that period, Sharon became heavily involved working with the victims of landmines and volunteered for the Vietnamese Assistance for the Handicapped. Becoming a strong activist against landmines, she has since worked alongside the Red Cross to educate about and speak out against the unnecessary and cruel effects caused by landmines.

Landmines kill or maim over 26,000 innocent civilians *each* year - 500 people each week. There are 110 million landmines in the world today, and according to Sharon Carr, it would take 1100 years to rid the earth of the mines. Despite many de-mining programs found throughout many of the affected countries, between two and five million more mines are being planted every year. Selling for between \$3 to \$50 dollars, found readily on the black market, and sold by leading countries, mines are an easy and accessible weapon. The de-mining process is long, expensive and dangerous. Removing one mine can cost between \$300 to a \$1000.

Left behind long after the conflicts have ended,

landmines are found in areas least able to cope with the disasters the mines bring forth. Intended as a military weapon, it is the poor rural areas who are the most affected and are devastated by the loss of their only cow or the inaccessible land. Furthermore, poor families must look after the injured while having one or more members who cannot help with the chores or income. The planted mines also make transportation slower and more difficult and therefore a village or region may not receive, inoculations, vaccinations or other outside aid which they are needing.

Only recently have landmines received such attention and taken a centre stage as an important activist movement. And yet, as we learnt from Sharon Carr, it will take constant attention and continued support to at long last ban the mines and pursue a complete clearing away process. Eighty-nine countries, Canada leading the way, have recently agreed to ban the usage and construction of landmines. With thanks to people like Sharon Carr, who are educating and speaking out against mines, the achievements of the Oslo Conference and the future success' are made possible. On behalf of WUSC at UPEI, we would again like to again thank Sharon Carr for coming to our campus and sharing with us her experiences and the astonishing realities of landmines.



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