

Land-mine experts to meet on demining efforts (THAILAND) BANGKOK, Thailand, 1 October 2004 (The Nation)--

Land-mine experts from seven Asian countries will meet at a workshop in Bangkok next month to receive training on social and economic approaches to reducing accidents and dealing with mines left over from wars.

The four-day workshop, starting next Monday, will bring together land-mine specialists from the different countries and UN technical advisers to find ways to weave mine action efforts into national development plans of different countries.

Land-mine specialists from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iran, Laos, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Thailand are expected to attend the workshop organised by UN Development Programme (UNDP), the New York-based Mine Action Team and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

Chip Bowness, regional mine action adviser for the UNDP's Mine Action Team, said while preventing mine accidents is the dominant feature of mine action activities, other factors come into play when a conflict ends and longer-term reconstruction and development kicks in.

The focus is on individual's immediate survival and sustaining livelihoods, Bowness said.

He added that the transition period from open-conflict to sustained peace poses real challenges for demining programmes.

With mines still buried after wars and other armed conflicts have run their course, about 60 countries have millions of land-mines waiting to be tripped by unsuspecting innocents.

Afghanistan sustains roughly 1,200 casualties a year, and Cambodia has more than 630 victims a year, despite unremitting mine clearance programmes.

Thailand still has mines in 27 provinces but funding on mine clearance is a meagre Bt32 million. Critics say the Thaksin government needs to outlay far more on clearing border minefields.