

No easy solution for land mines

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4 March 2006

The international struggle against land mines made its presence felt Monday night when a representative from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining lectured and took questions in the Jubilee Hall Atrium.

Kerry Brinkert, a representative from the Implementation Support Unit for Humanitarian Demining, spoke about international cooperation for the land mine issue.

The lecture was sponsored by the Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations.

According to Brinkert, the United States stands with communist Cuba as the only two nations in the Western Hemisphere not among the signatories of the seminal Ottawa Conventions banning the use, stockpiling, production and transport of land mines.

However, Brinkert said some nations that have vowed not to sign the Ottawa Treaty, like the United States, still contribute to the effort monetarily.

Gretchen Novak, a former intern for Brinkert and senior editor for Promotions for the Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations, gave a brief introduction to the issue of unexploded ordinance.

"Eighty countries are affected by land mines left behind by war," she said. "They cause between 20,000 and 50,000 casualties every year."

Novak spoke further about the devastation caused worldwide by land mines, illuminating some of their often overlooked effects.

"Affected areas have their agricultural potential destroyed, and land mines also stymie development efforts in many countries," she said.

Brinkert said a problem with anti-personnel mines is that they are activated by their victims and are, therefore, indiscriminate.

"The Ottawa conference challenged states to something about this problem within 14 months. The risk paid off in September of 1997 when the Ottawa Conventions were signed in Oslo, Norway," he said.

Brinkert spoke about the nature of the Ottawa Conventions. He said as a Canadian he was pleased the treaty had retained its original title, but said Norwegians would not call it the Ottawa Treaty since it was signed in Oslo.

He said the Ottawa Treaty is innovative in that it puts the onus of enforcing the prohibition on the domestic governments of the signatory nations.

"All but 14 out of 149 members have absolutely no stockpiles of land mines," Brinkert said.

When questioned about technological advancements that might aid the process of mine clearing, Brinkert said there was no one best solution.

"There's been a lot of money thrown at the problem (of mine clearing), but there's no silver bullet," he said. "The important thing is adapting existing technologies to appropriate situations."

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