

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION 4 April 2020

Decades ago, millions of landmines were buried in countries across the world. From Cambodia to Mozambique, in Angola and in Afghanistan, thousands of lives were lost, with others altered forever because of one unlucky step. The outcry by civil society in the early 1990s drove the multilateral system to take a stand against the use of anti-personnel mines, leading to the Mine Ban Convention of 1997 and other crucial frameworks. Today, many countries have declared themselves mine free – with others well on the way.

Now, the world is facing a daunting pandemic. The dangers posed by COVID-19 are forcing every country, and every person, to take steps that would have seemed unimaginable mere weeks ago. It is for this reason that this year's observance of the International Day for Mine Awareness has been scaled back. The football tournaments, due to take place on land cleared of explosive ordnance, have been cancelled; the events aimed at bringing together the mine action community will take place virtually, if at all.

Yet, even in the midst of an unprecedented crisis, we cannot let this Day go unnoticed, nor can we allow the rights of persons with disabilities to go unacknowledged. Mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices threaten some of the most vulnerable people in society: women traveling to markets, farmers herding cattle, humanitarian workers trying to reach those most in need.

Moreover, the achievements of the mine action community show that, in working together, we can reach milestones once seen as impossible – a timely message for our efforts today to suppress transmission of the pandemic.

So let us remember the people living under the shadow of explosive ordnance, from Syria to Mali and elsewhere. As many people around the world work safely from home, they will remain exposed and vulnerable. And, when the world emerges from today's crisis, they will continue to need our support.