

Mine Risk Education is one of the five pillars of mine action defined in the Mine Ban Treaty and included as a Treaty obligation. It has a crucial role to play in alerting people to the dangers of explosive ordnance and the steps they can take to minimize the risk to themselves and others. The need for innovative, effective and quality mine risk education is crucial today, when casualty numbers have risen, and civilians continue to face threats to their lives and livelihoods.

Twenty years on from the entry into force of the Treaty, thousands of people continue to be killed and injured each year by mines and unexploded ordnance including antipersonnel mines - both factory-made and improvised. Since 2014, the casualty numbers have increased dramatically, with a peak of over nine thousand casualties reported in 2016. In 2018 the number of reported casualties remains unacceptably high at nearly seven thousand, almost double the number recorded before the Maputo Review Conference and equating to a staggering 20 casualties per day. Most recorded casualties are civilians, with child casualties, mainly boys, forming more than half of these victims.

Together with clearance, mine risk education is the primary means of preventing injuries and fatal accidents and contributes to building the resilience of affected communities. Yet, despite this, mine risk education has been somewhat neglected in the last decade. Reduced resources, expertise, donor funding and a lack of strong coordination mechanisms and leadership has resulted in limited progress and innovation in comparison with the other mine action pillars.

In 2019, with the launch of the Oslo Action Plan, the mine action community has a strategic opportunity to reaffirm the importance of mine risk education. We must recommit investment in innovative, integrated and effective programming. Norway has shown leadership in enhancing coordination, and international organizations and NGOs are bolstering their MRE work. Renewed support will benefit the activities of many of the ICBL members providing MRE at national and local levels. The Oslo Action Plan calls for greater commitment of State Parties to ensure that context-specific and targeted mine risk education is conducted and integrated with the other mine action pillars and with the wider humanitarian, development and protection efforts. To ensure effective implementation and follow-up of actions on risk education, it is crucial to establish a separate thematic coordinator or a focal point on RE, or at the very least specifically include this area in the mandate of already existing structures in the treaty machinery such as the Committee on Art. 5.

The call for mine risk education is long overdue, but collective action and renewed longer term resource commitments are vital if casualty trends are to be reversed.

Everyone has the right to know how to stay safe.