

## **Introductory remarks on mine risk education by Ruth Bottomley, ICBL-CMC Researcher**

I want to give you three scenarios which I observed this year:

- In Battambang province, in the northwest of Cambodia, a group of adults and children are participating in an MRE session. The children sit eagerly in the front row – they know all the answers to the questions posed by the MRE team and are keen to show their knowledge. A chorus of voices identify the mines on the poster and offer what they should do to avoid entering mined areas, or who to report to if they come across a mine.
- Also in Cambodia, in Ratanakiri province in the far northeast, an MRE session is being conducted in the local language for a group of ethnic Tampuan villagers. A mother, listening intently to the information, suddenly turns and calls to her teenage son. “Come here, this is important, you need to hear this!” He comes to join with three of his friends, and the MRE educators spend time discussing with the boys their knowledge of the danger of ordnance, and their responsibility to keep themselves and others safe.
- In Mosul in Iraq, many people, particularly men, are returning to the city to check their houses and belongings, but with trepidation and uncertainty as to what they will find. An MRE team member, herself from Mosul, spoke of how important it was to talk with the returnees, to warn them of the dangers and what to look out for, who they could contact if they found something suspicious, and the areas within the city that should be avoided. And also, she said, her job was to listen, to understand and to help equip traumatized people with some knowledge that would help them to cope in a most uncertain and difficult time.

In each of these examples, the value of MRE is clearly recognized, both by the teams giving the education and by those receiving it. These are just three, brief cases, and all the risk educators here would be able to give you many others. On Monday, for example, I talked to the ICBL team from Colombia who told me that MRE is sometimes the only intervention in remote communities where armed actors are still present. Training teachers in risk education in these areas is essential to help keep children safe. If we consider these cases and multiply this by the hundreds of men, women, girls and boys reached through mine risk education every day, and the thousands reached every year, we can begin to understand the real impact of MRE and why it is a vitally important pillar of mine action. While MRE programs are cost-effective, we must also consider the potential cost if there was no such support.