

countries. The Security Council unfortunately confined its scrutiny to situations already on its agenda, and although the secretary-general's report had not been presented at the time of writing, it was expected to name government forces and armed groups in just a handful of countries. Nevertheless, the Council's request set an important new precedent for international censure and sanction on this issue.

During the year, Human Rights Watch undertook in-depth research on two of the world's worst cases of the use of child soldiers: Burma and Colombia. In Burma, the national army was found to systematically and forcibly conscript children as young as eleven, and children were forced to participate in combat and in human rights abuses against civilians. Although evidence suggested that as many as seventy thousand children were part of Burma's army, the government persistently denied its use of child soldiers. Human Rights Watch documented the use of child soldiers also by most of Burma's ethnic armed opposition groups. In Colombia, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than one hundred former child combatants who had fought with left-wing guerrilla and right-wing paramilitary groups. Many were as young as eleven when recruited, and most had participated in combat. Once in the ranks, children who ran away were often killed as suspected informers if they were caught, and some children were forced to carry out executions themselves.

While these situations remained grave, there were notable breakthroughs elsewhere, with significant demobilization of child soldiers in Sierra Leone and southern Sudan, and some progress in Afghanistan and the DRC. In Sri Lanka, the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam committed to ending child recruitment and demobilizing children as part of their peace negotiations with the government.

Antipersonnel Landmines

There were also great strides forward in global efforts to eradicate antipersonnel landmines. The number of states parties to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty had grown to 130 as of mid-November 2002, and another sixteen countries had signed but not yet ratified. It was particularly notable that Afghanistan, Angola, and the DRC became states parties: all three are heavily mined countries that have recently used antipersonnel mines, only then to reject them in the wake of peace initiatives.

According to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2002*, coordinated by Human Rights Watch for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the number of governments actively using antipersonnel mines dropped in the past year from thirteen to nine, and a total of seven million stockpiled antipersonnel mines were destroyed by Mine Ban Treaty states parties. In the five years since the treaty was initially signed, the number of new mine victims each year has dropped dramatically, the number of new mine clearance and other mine action programs has increased greatly, mine action funding has totaled over U.S.\$1.4 billion, the number of antipersonnel mine producing nations has dropped from fifty-five to fourteen, and global trade in antipersonnel mines has been reduced to a smattering of illicit or covert transactions.

However, the report also noted that ninety countries are still affected by landmines and/or unexploded ordnance (UXO), and there were new mine/UXO victims in sixty-nine countries. In the first half of 2002, India and Pakistan engaged in

some of the largest mine-laying operations anywhere in the world in many years. And in 2001, global mine action funding stagnated—the first time in a decade that a significant increase had not been registered.

The ICBL worked very closely with key governments to ensure the success of the Mine Ban Treaty's intersessional work program, as well as the Fourth Meeting of States Parties in September 2002, focused on interpretation and implementation of the treaty.

Convention on Conventional Weapons and Explosive Remnants of War

Not unlike landmines, unexploded ordnance left behind after battle poses grave humanitarian risks to civilians. For example, cluster bombs disperse scores of volatile submunitions or bomblets over a wide area, many of which fail to explode on impact and lie in wait until triggered by an unsuspecting victim. International initiatives to tackle the problem of such explosive remnants of war (ERW) picked up momentum in 2002, focused in particular on the 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), which restricts and regulates the use of weapons that are “excessively injurious” or have “indiscriminate effects.” In December 2001, at the Second Review Conference of the CCW, states parties formed a Group of Governmental Experts to evaluate ways to deal with ERW, including the possibility of negotiating a new legally binding instrument. The group was due to submit its final report in December 2002. Human Rights Watch has played an active role in advocating for a new protocol, and has encouraged the expert group to focus on ways of minimizing the dangers to civilians of cluster bombs.

Weapons Trade

Following the failure of a 2001 international conference on small arms trafficking, Human Rights Watch worked with its partners to highlight the devastating humanitarian toll caused by the uncontrolled spread of such arms. For example, Human Rights Watch documented the dangerous nexus between small arms proliferation and political violence in a May 2002 report on Kenya. (See Kenya.) Human Rights Watch also contributed to efforts to control the global weapons trade from the supply side, emphasizing research and advocacy with respect to three priority areas: halting arms supplies to human rights abusers; stemming the trade in surplus weapons; and promoting the enforcement of arms embargoes. We also joined with other NGOs to promote the creation of a binding international legal instrument codifying minimum arms export criteria derived from the existing obligations of states under international human rights and humanitarian law.

Irresponsible arms trading by governments received increased attention in 2002, particularly in the context of sanctions busting and the fight against terrorism. For instance, serious allegations that the president of Ukraine approved an illegal arms sale to Iraq capped a long string of cases implicating Ukraine in illicit arms deals. The U.N. continued to monitor and report on violations of international arms embargoes on an ad hoc basis, documenting the ease with which unscrupu-