

A Field Full of Landmines

By Norah Ybarra

Around 20,000 innocent civilian lives are taken each year due to unexploded ordnances, more commonly referred to as landmines. During Model United Nations San Antonio, the respective delegations of SPECOL, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, debated with a great variety of opinions on how to ameliorate the situation. As can be expected, however, widespread agreement existed over the negativity of unexploded ordnances and the importance of the issue.

One prevailing notion was that countries with strong economies should contribute monetary assistance to remove landmines in populated areas. This was agreeable to the United States and China, but how their money would be utilized was yet to be determined. As such, the committee spent the bulk of their time developing consensus over the allocation of the funding.

The delegate of Iraq passionately argued that unexploded ordnances jeopardize the future of the country, as the primary victim of landmines is children. The delegate further stated that not only should previously placed landmines be removed, but steps towards banning them altogether should be taken. While supported by Poland and Japan, controversy existed over the idea of completely banning landmines.

An alternative solution to mitigating the damage of unexploded ordnances was locating them using rats. The delegate of Austria elaborated on the effectiveness of rats trained to find landmines as they are able to detect both metal and plastic, an ability unique to them. The U.S. disagreed, stating that the use of animal life is unethical and that the United States won't support a resolution using rats. The delegate of Egypt mentioned that rats, as animals, are not very reliable.

The delegate of Kazakhstan agreed that landmines are dangerous, but declared that they are still necessary for their national security. The delegate's strongest argument was that landmines were the easiest and most affordable way to secure their borders. Other delegates began to agree that some countries with large borders or other situations may have to use landmines. Iraq uneasily compromised for the time being stating that, "Banning all landmines is not impossible, but for the present time the delegate of Iraq will agree that some countries must use landmines on borders. The delegate of Iraq hopes it eventually will be a full ban." Kazakhstan added that there should be a limit on which countries are able to use landmines based on border length and the economic situation. However, it was acknowledged that borders change and the areas where landmines are placed could very likely become a populated area.

The problem with removing previously placed landmines was still an issue that could not be decided on. The delegate of Belgium provided another solution of using peacekeepers to locate landmines. At first this had the approval of Russia and Sweden. However, it was brought up that countries already had officials that were authorized to locate landmines and that there would not be enough peacekeepers to search all compromised areas.

Following this conversation, the committee debated whether or not to split up the committee based on region since each region has its own problems with landmines. This was the most agreed-upon statement, as most people thought it would be easier to come to a solution when dealing with a more concentrated area. Although, just like every other proposed solution, some disagreed; Ukraine and Belgium both dissented with the proposal.

There was no clear answer to the problem of unexploded ordinances, but the committee worked together professionally and respectfully. Despite not having an answer, as more delegates worked together and compromised, they started to work towards several solutions. When there are so many countries together trying to make decisions it is critical that they compromise, and it's clear that this committee room is well on its way to solving the issue that impacts so many civilian lives.