

## Students moved by presentation about landmines

### GLOBAL ISSUES

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The little girl in the short film got off her bike and walked curiously toward what looked like an old can in the ground.

As she did, the Grade 7 students watching the film murmured and flinched. Some covered their mouths or closed their eyes.

They'd just watched an earlier segment of Bosnian fighters laying the mines in the ground and covering them up with grass. They'd heard about the damage landmines can inflict on people.

The camera focused in on the little girl's foot nearing the mine. That was where the film ended. The Courtland Avenue Public School students let out their breath, slowly.

The film was part of a presentation Friday by volunteers and staff of the Canadian Landmine Foundation.

The foundation estimates there are still 45 million to 50 million mines in the ground in at least 70 countries.

Armies tend to leave landmines behind when a conflict ends, but the mines themselves can remain dangerous for many years, Maria Almudevar-van Santen, a Kitchener-based volunteer with the foundation, said before the presentation.

In fact, there are mines from the Second World War still occasionally exploding in Europe, she said.

But most landmines are in the poorest parts of the world -- 40 per cent of them in Africa.

"In Angola, you have 15 million mines and 11.5 million people," said Almudevar-van Santen. "In Cambodia, one in 263 people has encountered a landmine (explosion)."



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Paul Faucette of the Canadian Landmine Foundation holds a replica landmine as he does a presentation to a Grade 7 class at Courtland Avenue Public School.

It's estimated mines kill or maim 10,000 civilians a year -- 30 to 40 per cent of them children, said Almudevar-van Santen.

"It doesn't make sense that a child should have to worry about if they take a different path to school or help with family chores. . . . They might lose a limb. It just shouldn't happen."

Even when a mine doesn't kill, it can have terrible effects, said Almudevar-van Santen.

Rehabilitation is expensive and often not available to the poor. People who lose limbs might lose the ability to work and support their families. Their only alternative might be to beg.

Animals are often forgotten victims, but if a poor agrarian family suffers the loss of valuable livestock, it can be financially devastating, said Almudevar-van Santen.

There is some good news. A decade ago, Canada spearheaded an international effort to ban landmines. Since then, 155 countries have signed the mine ban treaty.

But there are still 40 countries, including the United States, Israel, Iran, Iraq, India, Pakistan, Russia and China, that haven't signed on.

And although there is mine-clearing work going on, it's slow and expensive. The Canadian Landmine Foundation says it costs \$300 to \$1,000 to locate and destroy a single mine. Laying one, on the other hand, can cost as little as \$3.

Students said the presentation moved them.

"It scared me," said Lauren Cowie, 12. "I didn't know there were so many of them."

"I didn't know they lasted so long," said Amy Winter, 13.

"You can never know where a mine is. It's quite freaky," said Jesse Price, 12, adding he wanted to help raise money to help landmine victims.

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