

INTERNATIONAL

Land mines remain big danger to Ethiopians

Twelve-year-old victim laments fate: 'I am angry that I can never run again'

ADIGRAT, Ethiopia (AP) — Aberhet Amha was an aspiring runner, winning medals for her school and dreaming of adding her name to the long list of great Ethiopian Olympic athletes. But just before her 12th birthday, Aberhet stepped on a land mine.

The slight, soft-spoken girl now can barely make the trip to her school in northern Ethiopia.

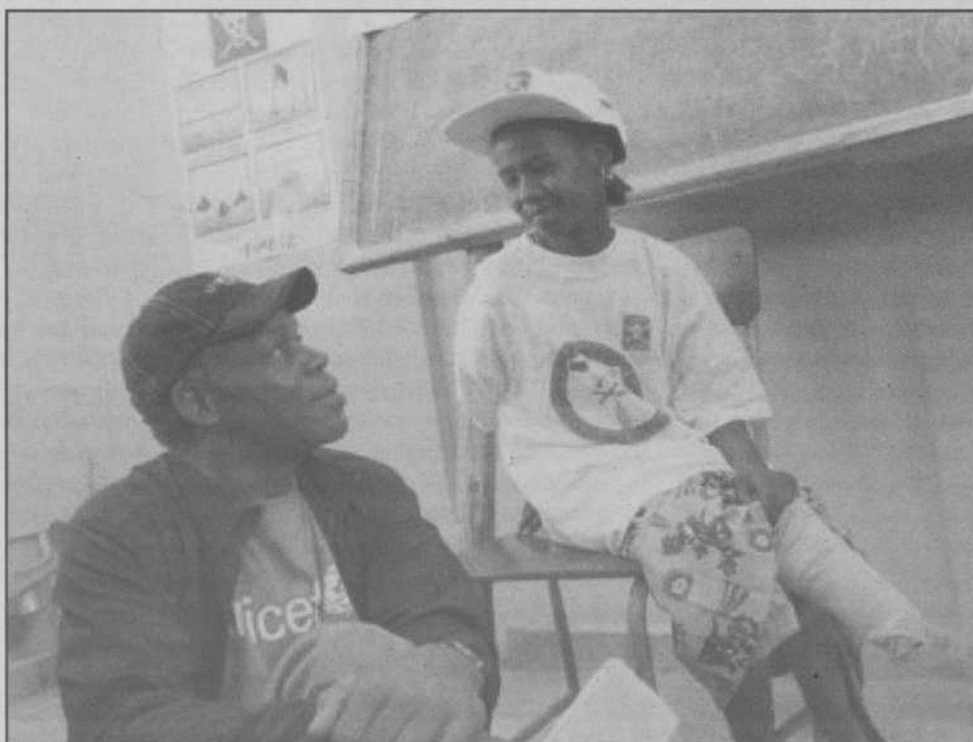
"I am angry that I can never run again," she told anti-land mine campaigners, including U.S. actor Danny Glover, visiting this heavily mined corner of Ethiopia before a summit on efforts to rid the world of the weapons.

"I don't want this to happen to anyone else," Aberhet said, wearing her artificial leg.

The arid plains and weather-carved canyons of Ethiopia's northern highlands are littered with land mines from the country's bitter border conflict with neighboring Eritrea, which ended four years ago.

Glover laid the blame squarely on world leaders for their failure to outlaw land mines.

"Our leaders talk about peace in the world yet the first thing they should start



UNICEF goodwill ambassador and actor Danny Glover talks to brave teenager Aberhet Amha about how she lost her leg when she stepped on a landmine, in Addis Tesfaye, near the border with Eritrea, Ethiopia. The country is littered with tons of the buried devices.

with is this deadly threat to our children," said Glover, who is a goodwill ambassador for the UNICEF.

"This little girl once had dreams that pompous men decided to take away," Glover said. "It is the most painful thing when somebody is injured by these weapons, but it is an additional injustice when it is a child."

Glover made the trip to Ethiopia ahead of an interna-

tional summit on land mines opening in Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday.

Officials and activists will review the successes and failures of the Ottawa Convention, which bans the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines and calls for mined areas to be cleared within 10 years.

Jody Williams, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997

for her work to ban mines and attended the conference in Kenya, said the Ottawa Convention had seen "tremendous successes" but risked failure.

"We would not be here... if governments did not hear us. If governments did not show incredible leadership," said Williams, who won the 1997 peace prize along with the International Campaign to Ban Land mines that she

helped to found. "We will not see continued progress if we don't meet the needs of land mine survivors."

Each day 60 people are killed or maimed around the world by land mines, according to UNICEF. Tens of thousands of them are children, treading on mines often years after wars have ended.

"Land mines kill, maim and orphan children," said UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy. "Countries have a moral responsibility to ratify the Mine Ban Treaty and rid the world of these devastating weapons."

But so far, the world's largest producers and users of land mines have refused to sign the treaty. The United States, China, Russia, India and Egypt all produce land mines and are among 42 nations that have rejected the treaty.

The United States has stockpiled 10 million anti-personnel mines, according to the International Campaign to Ban Land mines.

"As a citizen of the U.S., I feel embarrassed and angry that they didn't ratify the treaty," Glover said. "It is deplorable that my government is not interested in protecting girls like Aberhet."

Africa is the most heavily

mined continent, with more than 40 million weapons still in the ground. Angola, Afghanistan and Iraq are among the most heavily mined countries. While each mine can cost as little as \$3, they can cost \$1,000 to find and destroy.

Activists attending the summit in Nairobi, though, can claim some successes. So far some 143 nations have signed the accord, which took effect in March 1999. Since then more than 37 million stockpiled mines have been destroyed.

The Ethiopian parliament ratified the Mine Ban Treaty on Nov. 11, but it will take years before the country is free of the menace.

Aberhet's school, located near trenches that were the scene of some of the heaviest fighting during the two-and-a-half year war with Eritrea, is also just yards from a minefield that is currently being cleared.

Casualties, though, are still mounting. Just four months ago, five-year-old Hailoym Tecklay had part of his right hand blown off.

"I saw this shiny thing on the ground and picked it up because I thought it was a pen and I didn't have one for school," he said.

North Darfur government lifts human aid restrictions

KHARTOUM, Sudan (AP) — The governor of the troubled North Darfur state said Saturday his government has lifted restrictions on humanitarian aid groups in a sign of goodwill, but an aid official said the move was not enough to allow his group to resume work.

Barry Came, a World Food Program officer in Khartoum, said that as of Saturday night the U.N. security restrictions on the state still applied, adding that the easing of state government restrictions — although a welcome attempt to "lessen tension" — wasn't enough to allow resuming assistance.

"As of a few hours ago, there was no change in our operations," Came said.

Fighting between the government and rebels erupted last week and caused aid groups to suspend operations. The World Food Program said Thursday it was tempo-

rarily suspending its operations in most of the troubled state, cutting off some 300,000 internally displaced people from WFP food.

The governor, Osman Youssef Kebir, told The Associated Press that local government restrictions on aid groups' movements on roads had been lifted. He said he would hold a conference Sunday in the capital, El Fasher, to make the new policy official. He has invited representatives of the rebel groups, the African Union, and the European Union, which has a visiting delegation in El Fasher.

"We have gone beyond the escalation phase, and we as a government are responsible to protect citizens and push the peace process forward," said Kebir, whose government accuses rebels of killing at least 30 people in the latest round of fighting. "So we see that we should



Sudanese women in the Internally Displaced Camp of Mourni line up to receive cooking oil from the United Nations World Food Program. More humanitarian aid is expected.

call on the rebels to reject confrontations and escalation."

With this move, the government is reaffirming its commitment to all interna-

tional agreements, he said in a telephone interview from El Fasher.

"We open all the roads and doors to humanitarian groups and remove all restric-

tions on their movement and we call upon them to resume their operations," he said.

Despite a Nov. 9 cease-fire, fighting erupted last week between government-

backed militias, known as Janjaweed, and Sudan Liberation Army rebels. On Monday, the African Union mission rescued 45 humanitarian aid workers who fled the fighting.

The United Nations and Britain blamed the rebels for breaching cease-fire agreements. But the main rebel group, the Sudan Liberation Army, rejected responsibility for the renewed fighting in north Darfur, saying it was responding to attacks by the state air force and pro-government militia.

The 21-month conflict has driven an estimated minimum of 1.8 million people from their homes. International agencies estimate that disease, malnutrition and clashes among the displaced have killed more than 70,000 people since March. Many more have died in the fighting, but no firm estimate of the direct war toll exists.