

WORLD WITHOUT MINES

PROJECT: ZIMBABWE



Photos: HALO Trust

Desbell Tinoza (right) and his friends make their way through the mine belt.

„MY HEART BEATS LIKE CRAZY WHEN I THINK ABOUT MINES.”

For children living along the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique, walking to school is like running the gauntlet. They have to cross two of the world's densest minefields. So what do they want to do when they grow up? Work for World Without Mines.

Like most children of his age, Desbell Tinoza does not enjoy getting up at four in the morning, but as the oldest of five children, the twelve-year-old has a lot of responsibility. He has to fetch water from the well, cook porridge for the whole family, tend to the chickens and sweep the yard. He then has to leave the house at six to make sure he gets to his seat at Matoto Primary School, close to the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border, by eight.

His route is around five kilometres long, made up of well-trodden tracks and country roads through the bush. Theoretically,

Desbell could get to school within an hour, but it takes him twice as long. On the one hand because of the steep terrain, on the other because of the detours he has to take.

More mines than almost any other country

The reason for these detours goes back to a time before Desbell was even born. In the 1970s, the people of Zimbabwe began to rebel against their white colonial rulers. This led to a brutal civil war, which the black freedom fighters eventually won. But the legacy of the war still plagues residents



Despite the dangers of getting there, Desbell loves going to school – especially his English lessons.

After identifying the mined areas, the deminers began the clearing process that will enable the children of Matoto to one day have a safe route to school.



Photos: HALO Trust

When he's not at school, Desbell helps his parents in the field. The family makes a living raising cattle and growing corn.



to this day. The Rhodesian – as Zimbabwe was known then – Army made the borders to neighbouring countries impassable with up to 5,500 mines per kilometre. Zimbabwe therefore remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world to this day.

Desbell has to cross two of these mine belts daily – on a route marked only with makeshift warning signs.

Desbell says he didn't worry about the dangers the mines represented when he first started school. „I saw the warning signs with the skulls, but never thought anything of them.” This changed when several accidents occurred. Like when the headteacher of his school, known to all as „Mister Mafunga”, trod on a mine in a riverbed. He lost his right foot and lower leg. Seriously injured, he crawled through the water until someone heard his cries for help. Two teenagers suffered the same fate, one while collecting wild fruit, the other while trying to drive a cow out of a minefield.

This all made a huge impression on Desbell. „I wasn't scared before, but now my route had become a nightmare.”

28 cows lost

Desbell is not the only one who has to cross the minefields. A total of 26 children run this gauntlet every day, amongst them Trinity, one of Desbell's classmates. Unlike Desbell, Trinity understood the danger from an early age. Her parents went with her the first time she crossed the minefields and showed her where and how to walk. Trinity remembers being annoyed by these „instructions”, but she knew that without them she could suffer an accident, and they showed her just how dangerous her route to school was. During the last rainy season, some 28 cows trod on mines – a bitter loss for the farming families as the animals are worth around 250 USD each, and represent the family's entire capital.

Despite all of the progress made in clearing the minefields, Zimbabwe still has a 45 square kilometre area left to demine. This is planned to be completed during 2025 – an ambitious goal. World Without Mines is involved to help ensure that it is met. We have funded a nine-strong team in Zimbabwe since 2015. They searched 37,749 square kilometres of land in 2020 alone, finding 693 anti-personnel mines in the process. Every mine destroyed means a life saved.

Our work here has made a great impression on some of the children at Matoto Primary School, like Tariro Garwe, another of Desbell and Trinity's classmates. She says: „As soon as I am old enough, I want to work for World Without Mines and help to remove the last of the landmines in Zimbabwe.”

The warning signs of our project partner HALO Trust guide people walking in the border region between Zimbabwe and Mozambique.



Please help us to save lives by donating to World Without Mines.

Thank you very much!



Photos: World Without Mines/Linda Pollari

Rolf Stocker has succeeded Claudine Bolay as President of the Foundation Board of World Without Mines.

PASSING THE TORCH

Claudine Bolay Zraggen, President of World Without Mines since it was founded, is stepping down and passing on the torch after almost 25 years of tireless work. How can we do justice to such a long and dedicated career in just a few words? How can we honour someone who shies away from the limelight?

By Carol Hofer, Foundation Board member, World Without Mines

My best idea is to tell you a single, short story that for me so typically represents Claudine. One that sums up everything I have come to know about her.

A few years after I first heard about World Without Mines at a school parents' evening, I was in Bosnia picking my way between mines with Claudine, listening as she expressed her disgust at the poorly marked danger zones. Just a couple of plastic tapes! For a matter of life and death! Knowing that words alone are not enough in the male-dominated world of mine clearance, she made it her mission to ensure that these tapes were completely replaced with barbed wire.

This is precisely what Claudine stands for. Clarity, dedication despite every obstacle, never mincing her words, all to ensure that she almost always reaches her goal, no matter how long it takes. Our trip to Bosnia

was the first time I saw her like this, but in the following two decades, I saw it over and over again.

This is how Claudine has made World Without Mines a recognised player in the field of mine action, and freed thousands of people from this deadly danger. Only her last big goal – the vision of a mine-free world – is still to be achieved despite so many years of hard work. World Without Mines is still needed!

Over the years, Claudine's life's work, her „baby”, has grown up. Which is why the Foundation Board now has to say goodbye to her after many years of leadership. But the connection between Claudine Bolay Zraggen and „her” foundation will remain, that's for sure.

Thank you, Claudine, from the bottom of our hearts!



The successor: Rolf Stocker has led World Without Mines since 21 April. Having previously worked as an ICRC delegate, he has a wealth of experience in humanitarian mine action. An in-depth profile of the new President will follow in our September newsletter.

More information on World Without Mines projects can be found on our website: www.wom.ch/en

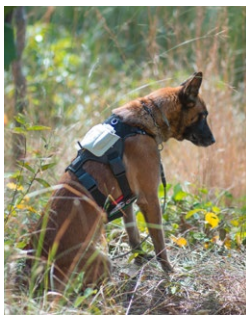
Mine detection dog Mannes with his handler Sarann



Photos: APOPO

SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION

Four years ago, World Without Mines funded the first mine search tool to use free-roaming dogs equipped with a GPS and camera system. The technology has since achieved fantastic results in Cambodia.



The SMART system with GPS transmitter is worn on the mine detection dog's back. The method reliably detects mines and cluster munitions.

Dogs have been used to search for mines and explosive devices for decades. Until now, this has mainly been done with leashed animals searching pre-defined routes. In 2016, World Without Mines began supporting a project that does things differently. The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) worked with the company Digger DTR to develop a system they have named SMART, which involves fitting dogs with a camera and a GPS device. This enables their handlers to track every movement on their smartphone and mark located mines on a map.

World Without Mines has funded a total of 20 SMART sets, four of which are currently in use in Cambodia. Over the initial 14-month test phase, teams from the international organisation APOPO searched an

area of 1,434,882 square kilometres using the new technology. They found 149 mines and 61 unexploded devices that could later be removed.

In order to verify the reliability of the dogs' work, deminers then searched the entire area again with metal detectors. They did not find a single additional mine.

The results of this test phase are ground-breaking and are a firm indication that SMART systems should be used in countries such as South Sudan and Angola. They are also just as important for having this method recognised in the national and international mine detection standards. We are delighted with this success and would like to thank our donors who have made the use of this new technology possible.

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