



# WORLD WITHOUT MINES

## UKRAINE



June 2022:  
Our partner organisation The HALO Trust starts clearing mines in the Kyiv region.

Photos: The HALO Trust

## „WE NEED 2000 ADDITIONAL DEMINERS”

Once Russian troops withdrew from the north of Ukraine, our local partner, demining organisation The HALO Trust, started the work of clearing landmines and explosives in this region. The high level of contamination with remnants of the war is a huge challenge for the teams, says Tom Dibb, Deputy Director for Programmes – West at HALO.

*Tom Dibb, you were in Ukraine in the spring. What was your experience?*

I spent several weeks in the country. I didn't go to the actual war zones, but the stress of war and displacement was tangible even in cities far away from the front line. I encountered huge numbers of internally displaced persons everywhere. Furthermore, the Russian army was also able to reach these towns with its missiles; the threat was real and ever-present. I then

travelled to the east of the country and met with our local teams. They were very worried. They do not know what the future holds for their country. They fear for their families as well as their jobs. But I was able to reassure them in terms of their jobs at least, and assured them that we have a clear objective in mind: We will stay in Ukraine, we are here to clear the country of mines, unexploded bombs, booby traps and explosive remnants of war, and we will



Interview: Tom Dibb,  
Deputy Director of  
Programmes – West at  
The HALO Trust

actually strengthen our presence here to do this.

*Even before the outbreak of war at the end of February, Ukraine was already one of the countries most affected by mines and remnants of war in the world due to the conflict in Donbas. The country ranks fifth globally in terms of mine victims. Now the situation is likely to get even worse.*

Yes, there is large-scale contamination. It used to be just Donbas that was affected but now other areas that were previously not contaminated are also being impacted. It's terrifying and tragic. It's still too early to determine the full extent of the situation, but we expect that there will be a lot of work to do. I foresee us being involved in Ukraine for decades to come.

*You mentioned that HALO will strengthen its presence in Ukraine. How and where will it do this?*

Up until now, we have been primarily based in Donbas, with a smaller group based in Mariupol. Since the Russians have now withdrawn from the north, we have been able to expand our activities there. I expect that we will need to create 2000

additional jobs to enable the civilian population to return. If troops withdraw from other regions, we will be able to enter these areas as well.

*The media has already reported on numerous accidents involving mines.*

This is indeed the case. We have only just started to get an overview of the situation but at the moment, it looks like anti-tank mines are responsible for over half of all accidents. The reason for this is that mines were laid over large areas of agricultural land by both sides, not just by the Russians. Once the Russian army withdrew from the north, farmers wanted to get back to work as quickly as possible, as Ukraine is one of the world's largest wheat producers. So they drove their heavy machinery across the fields, causing the mines to detonate.

*What approach are you taking to improve the situation as quickly as possible?*

In terms of anti-tank mines, we are working with the Ukrainian military and state deminers; they have already started this work. We are involved in a wide range of different activities at any one time. On the one hand, we're starting with the task



Large amounts of Russian mines, missiles and grenades are being found in the war zone.



Warning – mine:  
A TM-62M anti-tank  
mine was buried here.

of raising awareness of the risks as well as mapping the terrain so that we can assess the extent to which certain areas are affected by remnants of the war. On the other, we are undertaking the first actual clearance work.

*This work includes „Battle Area Clearance”, i.e. the systematic clearance of areas that are affected by varied remnants of war other than mines. World Without Mines is providing financial support for HALO specialists to be trained in Battle Area Clearance. How important is this work?*

Clearing war zones is a very important step. As we have already seen in Donbas, Russian troops fire a huge amount of artillery as well as missiles before they advance. Some of the munitions fired do not work and pose a threat to the remaining or returning civilian population. Furthermore, the troops also use cluster munitions that can contaminate a large area with highly dangerous unexploded bomblets.



According to numerous reports, the Russian army has also used cluster bombs. This part of the missile carries cluster munitions and hit the Kiev oblast.

*Regarding risk awareness, on top of the usual process of informing the population of the risks directly, you have launched a major campaign on social media. World Without Mines is helping with this.*

This is the most important step in preventing accidents. Social media allows us to reach a huge number of people quickly and easily so that we can let them know of the risks that they face and how they can deal with them. We received 51 million hits in the first month of the campaign alone, which is a huge success. We will continue raising awareness digitally, but now we are increasingly moving towards informing the public directly.

*Raising awareness is critical as there are reports that Russian soldiers scattered mines like breadcrumbs when they withdrew from the north.*

I also heard that but cannot confirm it at present. I'm awaiting the result of our own investigations. In particular, there is said to be a large number of booby traps. As far as I know, however, most are simply constructed, so something like a hand grenade connected to a trip wire, for example. Thankfully, we have not heard of any booby traps in items such as toys so far.

*Booby traps like that do not have any military importance. They are there only to spread fear and terror and prevent the civilian population from returning to the respective areas. What are your thoughts on people who leave behind such traps?*

If we suspect there to be booby traps, our investigative teams try to find the people who installed them. If we find them, we ask exactly where the traps are and how they were constructed. The people who built the traps are usually very helpful and regret constructing them.

*According to various sources, Russia is also using POM-3 mines – a new development with seismic sensors that detect people from as far away as 16 metres, launch into the air and then explode.*

We haven't come across any POM-3 mines yet. Because they are also completely

**WHAT WORLD WITHOUT MINES IS DOING IN UKRAINE**

**Raising public awareness of the risks**

As soon as the war broke out, World Without Mines supported the digital awareness campaign launched by The HALO Trust in Ukraine. Ads are placed on Facebook and Instagram to warn people against touching and picking up weapons. World Without Mines further developed the warning information to create videos, which have been viewed 56 million times as of the end of May.

**Training specialised deminers**

Following the withdrawal of Russian troops, large areas are highly contaminated with unexploded remnants of war munitions, which prevent or impede the civilian population from returning to the areas and rebuilding their lives. The type of contamination requires personnel specially trained in „Battle Area Clearance“ (BAC) or „Explosive Ordnance Disposal“ (EOD). World Without Mines acted quickly, providing USD 30,000 to finance two months of training. This support enables eight teams, each made up of nine BAC deminers, to start clearing explosive ordnance as soon as they have finished their training.

new to us, we need to recruit highly qualified demining personnel to deal with the issue. We may well use remote-controlled technology, such as robots, to defuse bombs.

*The use of anti-personnel mines like POM-3 is prohibited according to the Ottawa Treaty, as is the use of cluster bombs. Ukraine has signed the Treaty, but Russia has not. Does this mean that Russian soldiers can use these weapons with impunity?*

In principle, yes. However, Russia’s approach is unusual in so far as it is very rare that mines are laid in the territory of a state that has since signed the Ottawa Treaty. International humanitarian law is the only means of addressing such actions.

*How are you personally dealing with the fact that war has broken out in Europe again. A war that may spread even further.*

I have been a part of HALO for 26 years now. I find it extremely disappointing that we humans seem to have learned nothing from the past. I find the suffering experienced by the civilian population particularly concerning. It is therefore all the more important that demining organisations are on the ground to clear the country of any deadly threats. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in Switzerland who has donated – without this support, we wouldn’t be able to do what we do.

**Please support the people affected by the war with a donation.**

**Thank you!**



Ukrainian HALO Trust employees complete further training in preparation for clearing the combat zone.

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

**In 1997, two sisters attend a talk about mine victims and waste no time in founding World Without Mines. While the foundation may deliberately be kept small, it certainly achieves a lot.**

25 years ago, Monique and Claudine Bolay decided to address the mine problem. The two sisters have guided World Without Mines for over two decades.



Emanuel Christen was making prostheses when he gave a talk about the devastating consequences of landmines in 1997. Sisters Claudine and Monique Bolay were in the audience. Not only were they deeply impressed, the shock of what they learned compelled them to take action straight away, raising funds and founding the World Without Mines Foundation together with Emanuel Christen soon after. Rather than helping victims, the declared objective of the foundation is to prevent victims, namely in areas that do not receive much attention or have much money available, i.e. niches and „forgotten contexts“. This remains the foundation’s focus to this day.

The initial projects were small-scale but had a big impact nevertheless: Our team cleared mines laid around a village

in Mozambique, and in Sarajevo, World Without Mines helped demine a school for the blind that was destroyed in the war, thereby making it possible for the school to be rebuilt.

25 years later and we have undertaken 156 projects. We get involved in niche projects quickly and without the red tape. A newly founded local demining organisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo urgently needed start-up financing, for example, so World Without Mines transferred the money within a matter of days. But we also pursue visionary ideas, such as equipping mine detection dogs with cameras and GPS.

World Without Mines gets involved in areas where we can achieve a lot, so especially in countries and regions that are no longer headline news and are still suffering the effects of mines decades after war has ended.

For the local people, every mine cleared means a step towards a better future. Which is why we quietly celebrate all the small successes that have a major impact on people. And we are so grateful to our benefactors who have remained loyal to us for many years – thank you!

Sarajevo 1997: A narrow path through mined terrain leads to a school for the blind. This is where World Without Mines undertook its first project, helping to demine the school for the blind.



Photo: Stuart Freedman

Videos in the style of shadow puppet theatre inform children and young people on social media about the risk of explosive ordnance.



Photos: Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation

## LIFE-SAVING VIDEOS

**In one area, mines are being cleared and in another, they are being laid. For World Without Mines, the question is how we can save human lives more quickly than they are being endangered.**



In the first phase, the videos will be shown in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Vietnam. The objective is to warn two million people about the danger of mines.

Despite all the successes of mine clearance projects, more people are confronted with mines, unexploded ordnance and other remnants of war every day. And there are tragic consequences: Since 2013, the number of mine victims worldwide has doubled.

In light of this development, World Without Mines has decided to take a new approach in terms of raising awareness – the most important means of preventing further accidents. The solution? Digitalisation.

Digital channels such as Facebook present significant opportunities. They make it possible to reach large numbers of people as quickly as possible and with small budgets, so that the public can be warned of the potential hazards.

Our digital risk awareness campaign is primarily aimed at children. All too frequently, children want to play with the explosive devices that they find. But they often do not know what mines look like, where they are located and what to do if they find them.

We want to change this; in addition to a digital risk awareness project in Ukraine, we are working on videos in the style of shadow puppet theatre. The videos, which were created by the Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation, use the story of a farmer and his cow to illustrate how dangerous it is to ignore warning signs. Because the videos are gender- and religion-neutral, they can be used with translated subtitles in a variety of countries.

## IMPRESSUM

Circulation 20,000, published twice a year  
Text Estelle Eouattara, Gabriela Fuchs, Christian Schmidt  
Concept Oliver Gemperle GmbH, Zurich  
Printer: Druckerei Albisrieden, Zurich  
Paper Claro Silk, FSC

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