



WORLD WITHOUT MINES

SRI LANKA



Photos: DASH

Tamil and Sinhalese employees work together to remove the explosive remnants of the civil war.

„NO WAR DOES NOT AUTOMATICALLY MEAN PEACE“

Sri Lanka is on the home stretch to becoming free from land mines. Brigadier Ananda Chandrasiri, head of our partner organisation DASH, discusses the challenges he faces in his daily work and describes how the demining teams make reconciliation and peace a reality day after day.

World Without Mines: You are the head of Delvon Assistance for Social Harmony (DASH), the largest local land mine clearance organisation. At the same time, DASH makes a significant contribution towards promoting reconciliation and peace in the country. How do you do it?

Ananda Chandrasiri: Land mines are one of the main problems left behind by the devastating ethnic conflict. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and Sri Lankan armed forces fought against one

another for 30 years, with this conflict finally coming to an end in 2009. At DASH, we firmly believe that the most important contribution to lasting peace in our country lies in providing young people with the opportunity to earn their own living. In doing so they receive a secure source of income, but, most importantly, they get recognition from society. All of our employees are Sri Lankan nationals; the majority come from very poor families and from regions impacted by mines.



Interview: Ananda Chandrasiri was an engineering officer for the Sri Lankan army and today is head of the demining organisation Delvon Assistance for Social Harmony (DASH).



Thick vegetation and numerous metal parts in the ground hinder mine detection.

For our current project, World Without Mines is supporting a 31-strong demining team, a third of whom are women. What kind of experiences do mixed teams bring?

Some 23% of our 430 employees are women, all come from particularly destitute families, whilst many are widows or single mothers. DASH introduced the mixed-sex concept to the teams not only to offer the women equal employment opportunities, but also to strengthen their recognition within our society. Female minesweepers carry out the same difficult and risky work that their male colleagues do. As well as this, the integration of women has created a more cheerful team and a better atmosphere when it comes to teamwork.

A good number of your employees are also former child soldiers. How do you manage to build up trust and tolerance amongst people who once fought against each other?

The absence of war does not necessarily mean that peace prevails. We firmly believe that building trust between members of former conflicting parties is hugely significant to ensuring lasting peace in Sri Lanka. DASH employs a large number of former fighters. Some were recruited by the LTTE as child soldiers; by now they are well over 18 years old. They have all completed the government's rehabilitation programme, yet they still face problems finding work due to a lack of training and skills. For these people, a job at DASH is a major opportunity to reintegrate back into society.

Something unique to DASH is that members of both communities involved in the conflict work together. Our reconciliation efforts require a lot of understanding, pa-

tience and, above all, time. After all, it is likely to take some time until the wounds inflicted by three decades of ongoing conflict are healed.

What is the biggest challenge you face during your ongoing work?

In my opinion, the first challenge relates to actually executing the clearing operations as planned in order to achieve complete freedom from mines as early as possible. We are pleased and proud that DASH has consistently been able to achieve projected levels of clearance since we first started our work back in 2010 – this is thanks to the dedicated work of our employees. The second challenge is trying to find support on a continual basis for as long as needed until Sri Lanka is truly free from mines. We are very grateful to our donors for their valuable commitment – then, now and in the future.

What is your biggest wish?

To be able to continue with our national mine action programme with great efficiency so that, by the end of 2027, Sri Lanka can be declared mine-free.



Each defused mine brings more security to the people in the region.

World Without Mines in Sri Lanka

We have been working in northern Sri Lanka since 2019. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, political unrest and high inflation, the road to a mine-free future is taking longer than planned. But, despite all the hurdles, our demining team has achieved quite a bit over the last four years:

- 3,553 anti-personnel mines have been made safe
- 10,723 unexploded mines have been defused
- 339,100 square metres of land have been cleared and approved for continued use



Photos: The HALO Trust

With support from World Without Mines, Victoria completed her training to become an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Specialist.

A TEACHER BEFORE THE WAR – NOW A DEMINER

Following the outbreak of war in Ukraine, World Without Mines reacted quickly to provide funding to train deminers. Victoria is one such deminer and explains what is keeping her busy nowadays.

Following the outbreak of war in February 2022, World Without Mines began supporting its long-term partner organisation, The HALO Trust, by providing it with project resources for two urgent areas. Firstly, an online campaign was launched to warn people against touching or picking up land mines and explosive devices. At the same time, local personnel were trained in mine clearance. Such personnel are now clearing mines across Ukraine. These mines not only present a threat to life, but are contaminating large stretches of agricultural land.

Last year, Victoria was one of 132 people to take part in a demining training programme funded by World Without Mines. „When the war broke out, I didn't know how I was supposed to carry on living for a while. But then I faced up to this and realised that I needed to do something”, she recalls. Before the war, Victoria taught in a school near Kyiv. She was forced to flee when the Russians advanced on Kyiv in

February 2022. Following the invasion, she looked for work that would enable her to help her country directly.

In July 2022, Victoria learnt how to clear mines and explosive devices during a comprehensive four-week training programme. Since completing her training, she has been working in the Mykolaiv region, defusing antitank mines that had been laid along hundreds of metres of the south bank of the Inhulets river. She explains: „At the moment we are clearing mines in the village of Vasylivka. It is important to do everything carefully and safely like I learnt during my training to ensure no accidents occur”.

And what does working as a deminer mean to Victoria? „As improbable as it sounds, I enjoy my work – I'm not exaggerating –, I start at 5:30 a.m. when my alarm goes off and work all day because this means I can help people”.



The bank of the Inhulets river is heavily mined. Just in one section alone The HALO Trust team unearthed 200 antitank mines.

To date, 147 Angolan women have joined the minesweeping profession. They received the best possible training from our partner, The HALO Trust.



Photo: The HALO Trust

HER HANDS AND FEET TREMBLED

Laura Tchissingui is one of the women working for the „100 Woman in Demining“ project, which receives support from World Without Mines. An insight into the everyday life of a woman who is tenacious in her commitment to her work.

Please support the work of our deminers today with a donation.

Thank you!

At the beginning there was simply fear: fear of stepping onto a minefield, fear of getting injured or being killed. „Step by step I began to lose that fear“, explains Laura Tchissingui. The Angolan completed a substantial training programme with The HALO Trust, World Without Mines' partner organisation. Then followed multiple training sessions involving thorough monitoring. „This allowed me to gain trust in myself and now I feel secure in my work“, the deminer continues, „thankfully, my hands and feet don't tremble anymore“.

Laura Tchissingui has been working on the „100 Women in Demining“ project in north-western Angola – which is supported by World Without Mines – since the beginning of 2021. The province of Benguela is one of the most severely affected regions in the country. This makes our work and the objective of making Benguela mine-free by

the end of the year all the more important. The team of women have already cleared more than 150 minefields across the 46 square kilometre area – a magnificent achievement! The mines made accessing farmland and waterholes difficult and also impeded the development of infrastructure. Today, children and adults can once again move freely.

Laura Tchissingui is proud to have been part of this story. „We record very few mine accidents“, she explains, „because we proceed very cautiously“. A job with the team backed by World Without Mines guarantees the women an income, securing their livelihoods, strengthening their positions within society and promoting independence. Women like Laura Tchissingui hope that the support from abroad continues. „I pray that we continue to receive help until Angola is free from mines“.

IMPRESSUM

Circulation 20,000, published twice a year
Text Ursula Eichenberger, Vanda Mathis
Concept Oliver Gemperle GmbH, Zurich
Printer: Druckerei Albisrieden, Zurich
Paper Claro Silk, FSC

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WORLD WITHOUT MINES
MONDE SANS MINES**