

# WORLD WITHOUT MINES

CAMBODIA



Photos: zng

The Landmine Museum near Siem Reap

## ONGOING FIGHT AGAINST THE DEADLY LEGACY

Around 2.6 million people visit Angkor – the famous temple city in Cambodia – every year. What is less well known is that they can only move around there safely thanks to people like Bill Morse and organizations like the World Without Mines Foundation. As a long-time donor, I was able to experience first-hand how our support protects lives.

3 years, 8 months and 20 days – that’s how long the Khmer Rouge’s reign of terror lasted. From 1975 to 1979, up to two million people lost their lives, around a quarter of the population. Tens of thousands of landmines were laid across the country during this period and the subsequent civil war. Added to this are the millions of unexploded bombs from the Vietnam War. Even today, this explosive legacy claims victims every year.

Bill Morse wanted to do something about this. In 2003, he met Aki Ra, who had previously laid mines himself as a Khmer Rouge soldier – and began defusing them by

hand after the war. «This encounter changed my life,» says Morse. He gave up his business and has devoted himself entirely to demining ever since. He founded the Landmine Relief Fund (LMRF) and, together with Aki Ra, the Cambodian Self Help Demining (CSHD). This local organization clears anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance. CSHD has been supported by the World Without Mines Foundation since 2017.

Aki Ra now runs a landmine museum near Siem Reap. On my trip through Cambodia, I visited this museum and only there did I realize the full extent of the destruction that these weapons leave behind for



Etienne Strebel in full protective gear

Concentrated work on a minefield (Picture on the left)



Risk education at the Trapeang Prey School near Siem Reap (Picture on the right)



generations. Thanks to the coordination of World Without Mines, I was able to accompany Bill Morse and the clearance teams for a day and experience how CSHD is working to remove this deadly legacy.

Our first stop took us to the Trapeang Prey School, a few dozen kilometers outside Siem Reap. Deminers showed the attentive young people very clearly how to recognize explosive devices and how to behave correctly: Mark the location, report it, keep your distance.

We then visited a field where a farmer had discovered a grenade of Chinese origin. The clearance specialists deliberately detonate such explosive devices. It was around 40 degrees Celsius that day. Nevertheless, everyone had to wear protective vests and helmets.

The idea that someone could have accidentally set off this grenade filled me with relief and gratitude for the people who do this dangerous work every day.

Finally, I was allowed to accompany a team during the real mine search. Step by step, specialists explored a mine-contaminated area covering several square kilometers. In protective clothing and with a queasy feeling, I accompanied a deminer. «Walk directly behind the specialist! Don't take a single step into the area marked with cords and not yet cleared of mines,» I was told several times.

The clearance of all known minefields in Cambodia should actually have been completed by the end of 2024 – but the target is a long way off. Thousands of mines and unexploded ordnance are still endangering people's lives. My visit showed me how important our support remains so that the people of Cambodia can one day move around safely on their own land again.

*by Etienne Strelbel*

**OUR PARTNER ORGANISATION**

The teams of Cambodian Self Help Demining (CSHD) clear mines, remove explosive devices in emergency relief operations and conduct risk education. In 2024, Sokcheng Ung replaced Aki Ra as Director of CSHD. A very committed woman, she was a finalist for the Women of the Future Award Southeast Asia in 2024. In view of declining funding for demining, the organization is struggling to finance its work. To support them in this, World Without Mines enabled Sokcheng Ung to attend the National Directors Meeting and United Nations Advisors (NDM28) in Geneva in April 2025. All the key players in humanitarian demining meet there once a year.

[www.cambodianselfhelpdemining.org](http://www.cambodianselfhelpdemining.org)



Irene Rohner from World Without Mines and Sokcheng Ung at NDM28 in Geneva



Photo: The HALO Trust

Flooded minefield after the Kakhovka dam burst in Ukraine

## WHEN WATER BRINGS DEADLY SURPRISES

**Floods not only destroy houses, they also bring invisible dangers: Mines and unexploded ordnance are swept along for miles by the torrential waters and turn flooded areas into deadly traps.**

In Ukraine, following the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam in 2023 floodwaters washed hundreds of mines from marked minefields located along the banks of the Inhulets river far inland. «We will not know the exact number of displaced landmines until the waters subside,» said Mike Newton of The HALO Trust. «Some are damaged or buried deep in the mud, but they remain deadly,» warned Greg Crowther of the Mines Advisory Group MAG. Once HALO was able to regain access to the flooded minefields, they resurveyed large areas before continuing work to make the land safe.

It is not uncommon for floods to expose such dangerous contaminated sites. In 2014, Bosnia-Herzegovina experienced something similar after massive rainfall: Mines from the Bosnian war were washed onto fields and into villages. Warning signs disappeared and years of clearance work were wiped out.

Nigeria was not spared either. In the fall of 2024, a broken dam flooded almost a third of the region around Maiduguri. World Without Mines is carrying out a risk education project there together with MAG. The chal-

lenge is huge: The floods swept away unexploded ordnance and improvised mines, scattering them in villages where children play among the deadly remains.

«Most mines are watertight,» Swiss mine expert Franz Bär explains to the *Tageschau*. «As long as they remain in the water, the danger is low because the explosion is greatly dampened. But as soon as they are washed ashore, it becomes life-threatening.» Mines suddenly appear in places where nobody would expect them – in gardens, fields and residential areas. The search for explosive remnants of war begins anew.

World Without Mines does everything it can to defuse such dangers. With projects like the one in Nigeria, the organization ensures that education and support on the ground save lives – and prevent natural disasters from becoming permanent threats.

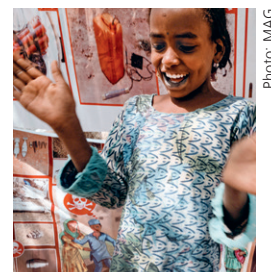


Photo: MAG

Risk education in Maiduguri, Nigeria

Photos: The HALO Trust



A deminer clears the way to a waterhole.

## WATER INSTEAD OF DANGER

**In Kasika, a remote village in northern Zimbabwe, clean water is now flowing where there used to be fear of every step – thanks to the work of our partner organization The HALO Trust.**



Shingirai Jamu enjoys clean water with her granddaughter.

«Walking ten kilometers every day, at over 30 degrees, with my granddaughter Nyasha on my back – just to fetch water. We were afraid to cut the walk short because we could have stepped on a mine,» recalls Shingirai Jamu with a serious look. For her and many women in the village, this was everyday life. Even children, barely seven years old, carried heavy water containers over long distances. «We felt forgotten. As if nobody knew we existed,» says the 52-year-old.

Then the turning point came: HALO began clearing the mines around Kasika. Meter by meter, the team financed by World Without Mines made the ground safe – and changed the lives of the villagers forever. «HALO didn't just remove the mines. We now have a well in the village – and even a drinking trough for the cattle,» says Shingirai with a smile.

Today, over 400 people have direct access to clean water. Women and children no longer have to walk for hours and fear for their lives every day. They have more time to grow vegetables or sell them at the market. «At last, I can contribute to their income – and I no longer have to take Nyasha to fetch water. She can play or go to school.»

The impact of mine clearance goes far beyond access to water. The cleared areas can now be used safely for agriculture and livestock farming. Mine clearance not only gives people back their security – it creates the basis for a better future.

**Please support our work in countries like Zimbabwe today with a donation.**

**Thank you very much!**

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MONDE SANS MINES**