



FOCUS ON SRI LANKA

About mines, courage and hope: A new beginning after civil war

After years of displacement, Kiguraweli Thayaparan and his family return to their village of Nainamadu in northern Sri Lanka. A house and land to grow vegetables and rice are ideal conditions for a new start. But the soil hides the deadly legacy of 26 years of civil war.

When Kiguraweli Thayaparan was born in Mullaitivu district in 1971, no one could have imagined that this place would become one of the most fiercely contested regions in Sri Lanka's civil war. He attends school until the eleventh grade, but the conflict that broke out in 1983 prevents him from completing his education and destroys all his plans for the future.

With no education and no prospects, Kiguraweli temporarily joins the Tamil Tiger Liberation Army, which is fighting for an independent state for the oppressed Tamil population. At the same time, the young man works as a laborer to support his parents. But the war does not spare his family: one of his brothers, also a member of the Tamil Tigers, is killed in the fighting.

In 1991, Kiguraweli marries his wife Mallika – he is 20, she is 19. Together they start a family and have children. However, the civil war forces them to flee again and again.

When government troops advanced in 1996, the young parents take refuge in a camp for internally displaced persons. Later, with the help of one of Kiguraweli's brothers, they move into a house in the town of Vavuniya. In this part of Sri Lanka, they are safe for the time being, although they have no long-term prospects.

When a cease-fire is declared in 2004, they return to their home village. But their hopes for a peaceful life are short-lived. In 2008, fighting breaks out again and

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the family is forced to flee to Vavuniya again. It is not until 2009, when the civil is finally ended, that they are able to return for good.

Invisible danger

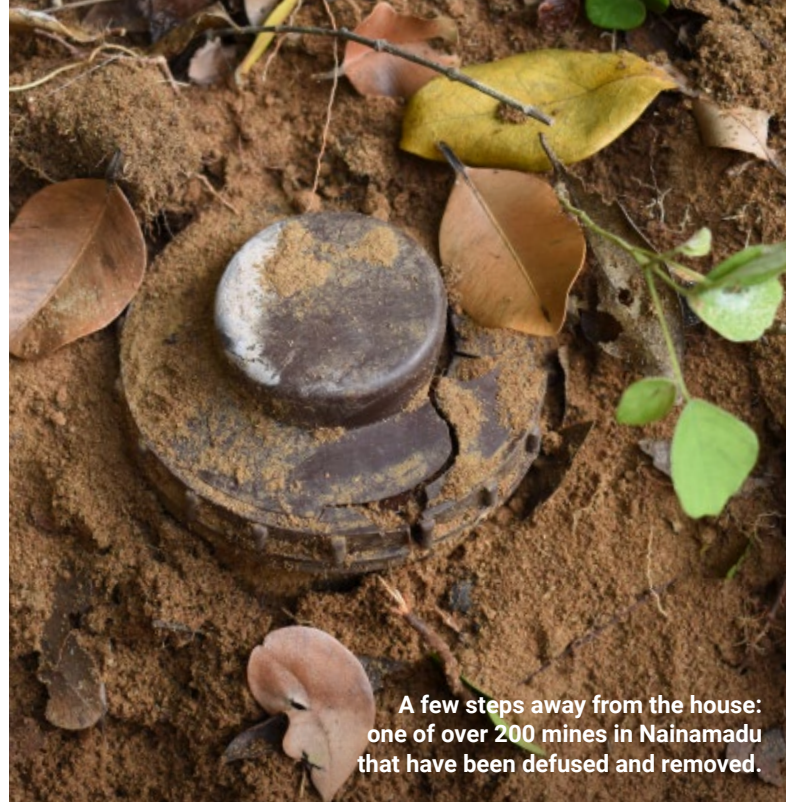
Returning to Nainamadu is a new beginning for the family. Kiguraweli and his wife begin farming, raising livestock, and building a new life. But just a hundred meters from their home, the deadly legacy of war lurks. The adjacent jungle – officially declared a restricted zone – is littered with mines and unexploded ordnance. «Without the forest, we were missing an important part of our existence,» Kiguraweli recalls. It was where the villagers once gathered firewood, honey, and medicinal herbs. It was also where their cattle grazed.

Now the area is unused, and the fear of being injured or killed by a mine is a constant companion. The explosive remnants of war are an invisible danger to life, especially for children playing.



New life on demined land

The turning point comes when a team financed by World Without Mines begins systematic demining. In meticulous work, the deminers of the partner organization Delvon Assistance for Social Harmony (DASH)



fight their way through the forest, risking their lives with every step. During their dangerous mission, more than 200 explosive devices are dug out and defused. Finally, Kiguraweli's house is in a safe zone.

When the area is officially declared mine-free, it will be a liberation for the family and the entire village community: the forest will be accessible again, and fields and pastures can be used. The people of Nainamadu can now earn their own living. They harvest coconuts and areca nuts from the trees, and their rice fields yield good harvests.

Today, Kiguraweli looks to the future with hope. He has lost much in his life, but his courage and determination remain - and with them, his renewed faith in a good life. «I am eternally grateful to the deminers. Without their help, we would still be living in constant fear.»

Our work in Sri Lanka

Since 2019, World Without Mines has been supporting the demining teams of the DASH organization in Sri Lanka. The workers belong to different ethnic groups and often come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their work not only provides a secure income, but also fosters trust and reconciliation between formerly hostile communities. To date, the teams have defused 13,870 mines and unexploded ordnance and cleared 339,921 square meters of land ●

*«I always tell my friends
to be wary of strange objects.»*

Ramadan (10), from Juba in South Sudan



The little ambassador: Ramadan wants to save lives

Ramadan grows up with his parents amidst scrap metal, dirt, and garbage at a landfill in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. Here, every day is a struggle for survival, with hunger and poverty ever-present. But the boy's greatest danger lurks in the garbage: explosive remnants of the civil war.

While other children head off to school early in the morning, Ramadan goes to the garbage dump. Here he searches for something to eat for himself and his family. And for scrap metal to sell to collectors. «It's the only way we can survive,» says the ten-year-old. But what looks like valuable scrap metal could be a deadly surprise.

No peace in sight

South Sudan has been in turmoil for more than 50 years. Armed conflicts have shaped the country, and explosive remnants of war are scattered throughout. Because some of these conflicts are still ongoing, systematic demining is impossible in many areas.

Knowledge saves lives

World Without Mines is committed to educating the community about the risks and is funding a mobile team from its Danish partner organization DanChurchAid (DCA). The team raises awareness of the dangers of mines among the local population and also targets children and young people who are particularly at risk. One of them is Ramadan: «I found a lot of unexploded ordnance from the war. During the training, we were taught never to touch, throw or burn such objects. I now explain this to all my friends and neighbors,» he says.

Ramadan takes his job seriously. He knows his knowledge can save lives ●



AI and the future of humanitarian demining

Artificial intelligence could revolutionize demining. Shahab Moeini is Head of Strategy at SubSphere, a company specializing in this field, which is working with World Without Mines to prepare the first pilot projects in Sri Lanka and Cambodia. In this interview, he explains how AI can save lives and why his company is willing to help humanitarian organizations for free.

Shahab Moeini, how reliable are current AI-based methods?

Artificial intelligence can help solve problems in demining, but it also has its limitations. It does not replace expertise, but rather enhances the capabilities of trained deminers. AI enables faster and more reliable decisions. Our system is correct 85 percent of the time for standard surface mines. We are not yet at that stage with buried mines.

How do you deal with the problem of false but plausible results?

At SubSphere, we are committed to transparency. We publish our bug logs and are honest about the limitations of our technology. AI is not the ultimate solution, but it is a powerful tool. While false positives slow down demining, false negatives can be potentially fatal. That is why we rely on the expertise of AI scientists and mine action experts.

Why do you have an office in Switzerland as well as in Canada?

Switzerland is home to major demining organizations. This concentration of expertise makes the country a driving force in shaping global mine action policy. At the same time, Switzerland is a leader in drone and sensor innovation. Many of the components and technologies we use are developed in Switzerland.

How much does your Deminer™ technology cost?

Maintaining 24/7 operations with a team of six people costs about 300,000 dollars per year. Many large

companies are interested in our product, but they also want to adapt the system for military purposes. This is not our mission. This technology is meant to save lives, and our work remains purely humanitarian. Since March 2025, we have provided free access to Deminer™, including training and support, to mine clearance organizations.

How could AI change mine action in the next five to ten years?

AI has the potential to make mine clearance faster, safer and more scalable. We are expanding the capabilities of our system to detect a wider range of unexploded ordnance. We are also exploring the integration of AI with robotics for precise remote intervention – similar to a surgical robot. Full automation remains a long-term goal.

Full interview: www.wom.ch/en/news/current

Shahab Moeini has worked as a humanitarian aid worker for the International Committee of the Red Cross and has cleared mines himself. He knows how destructive mines can be to the lives and development of entire regions. Today, he combines his expertise in drones, remote sensing, and artificial intelligence with humanitarian aid to clear mines faster and safer.

More safety, less effort

AI-powered drone systems are opening up new possibilities in humanitarian demining. By combining various sensors with machine learning, it is possible to detect mines from the air. The AI recognizes visual patterns and temperature changes that indicate the presence of explosives. This method is faster and more cost-effective - conventional landmine defusing currently costs up to 850 Swiss francs. It also significantly reduces the risk to deminers.

There are still barriers to widespread adoption: insufficient data, regulatory hurdles, and the need to adapt algorithms to different types of terrain. Nevertheless, the systems are at a promising stage of development. That is why World Without Mines has teamed up with its partner organizations CSHD in Cambodia and DASH in Sri Lanka with the company SubSphere. By the end of 2025, their AI application Deminer™ will also be tested for the detection of cluster bombs and other unexploded ordnance (UXO).

How AI-powered demining works:

1. The drone flies over suspected minefields to collect high-resolution aerial imagery.
2. The drone scans the area using infrared, thermography, laser rangefinders and ground-penetrating radar.
3. An AI system then examines the collected data for patterns that indicate hidden explosives.
4. Clearance teams create an accurate map, and the demining operation can begin.



Protect people from mines – beyond your lifetime

Your donation is the best way to demonstrate your commitment to helping the most vulnerable members of our society. With your last will, you can continue your commitment to a mine-free world beyond your lifetime. For example, with a legacy to World Without Mines. Your support goes directly to mine action and saves lives – for a future where children can grow up without fear and people can start again after a war.



Do you have any questions, or would you like a personal consultation?

Our co-director Vanda Mathis will be happy to take the time for a confidential conversation.

Phone: 044 241 72 30, email: vmathis@wom.ch

More information: www.wom.ch/en/how-you-can-help/legacies-inheritances

OUR 2024 ACHIEVEMENTS IN NUMBERS

7
Projects

were implemented in
seven countries last year.

71,443
People

are now safer thanks to land
clearance and risk education.

135,055
Square meters

have been cleared of
explosive ordnance.

Thank you very much for your support!