

# WORLD WITHOUT MINES

PROJECT: ANGOLA



Photo: The HALO Trust

We helped train this team of nine women to clear mines.

## „MY FIRST LANDMINE WAS THE MOST DANGEROUS.”

Charitable donations are making it possible for Luciana Tchiteculo to help clear Angola of mines. This is not just helping her country; it has also improved Luciana's prospects for the future.

Not even Google Maps knows where this place is: Kanenguerere is a small village in Angola's hinterland. It is situated in a dusty wilderness and is surrounded by hills covered with bushes and shrubs. The fact that a train to Benguela passes by very closely only serves to reinforce the sense of isolation in Kanenguerere, which has no train station itself. The 30 inhabitants of the village live in simple huts built with railway ties or other materials villagers have collected.

Despite its remote location, Kanenguerere was also affected by the Angolan Civil War, which began in 1975 and continued, with some interludes, until 2002: The village remains surrounded by five mine fields to this day. The mines are spread out along the railway line and scattered throughout the hills and across the dusty trails that lead to Benguela. In other words, the deadly threat is everywhere. Jorge Casimiro, the head of the village of Kanenguerere, would like to change that. „The people in our village are



Photo: The HALO Trust

Luciana Tchiteculo is part of the World Without Mines team. She is currently working with her colleagues in the region around Kanenguerere.

Photo: The HALO Trust



Mine fields are often located right next to housing settlements, as is the case here in Kanenguerere.

sick of all this fear,” he says.

### Hope at last

Landmines still explode in the region every once in a while. A few years ago, for example, a woman unfamiliar with the area around the village lost a leg after she went looking for some firewood. Fortunately, none of the residents of the village have been injured or killed by the mines, but the same cannot be said of their livestock, which are their only possession and their sole source of income. Cattle and goats have to cross the mine fields when they go to the nearby Okavango river, which is the most important water source in the region. „Nine animals have been killed up until now,” says Casimiro.

The Angolan government is trying to clear the country of mines, but its efforts are focused on densely populated areas with more advanced infrastructure. Nevertheless, there is now real hope for Kanenguerere and other villages in the area, as World Without Mines has been operating in the isolated region since the summer of 2017. Our project will eliminate the danger posed by mines while also addressing a major problem in Angola: poverty among women.

### Threatened by poverty

Last year, we began putting together an all-women demining team in cooperation with our partner organisation HALO Trust. Specifically women with very low or absolutely no income were targeted to join the team.

Luciana Tchiteculo is one of the nine women on the World Without Mines demining

team. Luciana grew up near Kanenguerere but was forced to flee the area as a child because of the civil war. When she and her family returned, most of their village had been destroyed and the area surrounding it was infested with landmines. „I know what it means to live among mines,” she says.

After passing a comprehensive aptitude test and participating in extensive training courses taught by experienced deminers from HALO Trust, Luciana and her colleagues began working in Kanenguerere and other villages in the region a little less than a year ago. Her job is extremely challenging, and not just because of the scorching heat: The soil in the area is full of rocks and very hard, which makes it difficult to dig. In addition, some of the mine fields in the region are among the most dangerous in the world, one reason being that they contain PPMi-Sr mines, which can kill within a radius of up to 40 metres. As it turned out, Luciana’s first mine was a PPMi-Sr. „I was afraid, of course,” she recalls, but she also says she has got used to the danger now.

### Life is getting better

Despite all the difficulties, the women on the demining team have been quite successful: They have deactivated 59 mines since the summer of 2017, liberating nearly 9,000 square metres of land from the deadly threat the landmines posed. Luciana is very pleased that this accomplishment also marked the first time that an entire mine field in Angola (KK378 in Kuando Kubango province) was cleared by a team consisting exclusively of women. „My colleagues and I are making Angola a beautiful country once again,” she says.

Luciana is also very happy that her life has got better thanks to the financial support she has received from Switzerland. Before training as a deminer, Luciana worked as a salesperson, but her wages were not nearly enough to make ends meet. Things are different now that Luciana is making US\$300 per month. That is enough money for her to live on, and she can even put something aside to save for her young daughter’s future education or training.



Angola was ravaged by civil war between 1975 and 2002. The conflict left behind an explosive legacy of mines and munitions that have killed thousands and injured 80,000 to date.

# LANDMINE VICTIM CLEARS UNEXPLODED ORDNANCE

En Poy is making his vision a reality with the help of only one hand and one eye: „I want to make my country safer.”

En Poy, a 28-year-old explosive ordnance disposal specialist in the city of Siem Reap in Cambodia, goes into action when local police or residents discover a suspicious object. He knows from his own experience just how dangerous landmines can be. Back when Poy was 12, he and his friends played with a landmine they found in the ground. After a while, Poy’s friends walked away (they were supposed to be minding cows), but Poy continued playing with the mine – until it exploded and blew off his right hand and damaged his eyes so severely that he became blind in one eye.

Poy’s frantic parents took him to a reception camp to see Aki Ra, a former child soldier who now works as a deminer and also helps victims of landmines. Poy liked living in the camp with Aki Ra. He quickly made new friends, and after finishing his schooling he began working as a security guard for Aki Ra’s demining organisation, Cambodian Self Help Demining.

Poy wanted to be more than a security guard, however: He had a vision of making his country safer and protecting other children from landmine explosions. He therefore decided to become a deminer. „The training was difficult – after all, it’s easier



Photo: CSHD

En Poy at work for our partner organisation Cambodian Self Help Demining, which was established by former child soldier Aki Ra.

to work with two hands than with one,” Poy recalls. Nevertheless, he passed all the required tests. Poy got married in 2015 and now lives with his wife, Boeuy Phun, and their two-year-old son, Kham Chhit.

Although demining activities continue to move forward in Cambodia, Poy’s work is far from over. „There are still so many mines and explosive materials out there,” Poy explains. „How are people supposed to build and farm on land like that? We also need to teach people what to do when they find something suspicious.” Poy is therefore very grateful to World Without Mines for the support it has provided to Cambodian Self Help Demining. „I hope that nobody ever has to experience what I experienced and be left with a handicap because of a landmine,” he says.

Unexploded ordnance is often just as dangerous as a landmine.



Photo: CSHD

Deminers discover all types of unexploded devices every day.

Photo: CSHD



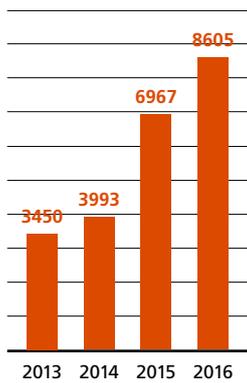
**Please support the clearing of explosive devices by making a donation.**

**Thank you very much!**

# THE NUMBER OF LANDMINE VICTIMS HAS RISEN TO 8,605

Landmines kill or injure someone every hour – a sad new record.

Number of landmine victims per year



Source: Landmine Monitor 2017

Although it will soon be 20 years since the Ottawa Treaty was signed, the number of casualties caused by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) has now reached a new all-time high: In 2016, accidents involving landmines and other explosive ordnance killed 2,089 people and injured 6,516. More children than ever before were involved in such incidents, as 42 per cent of the victims were minors. What these numbers mean is that mines now kill or injure someone nearly every hour. „Only” ten landmine accidents a day occurred back in 2013, which is less than half of the current figure.

The huge increase is largely due to the long-running conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine and Yemen. Flashpoints as in Syria and Myanmar have also contributed to this development, as improvised explosive traps have been systematically utilised in these countries. Such traps are often laid in order to make it more difficult for people to return to their homes after a conflict has ended. They are set to explode



Photo: MAG, Bob Gravett

So-called improvised mines are one reason why the number of landmine victims is so high: These explosive traps made of pots were laid by the Islamic State.

when a door or a refrigerator is opened, for example.

It is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the types of mines or explosive traps that are subject to the provisions of the Ottawa Treaty and those that are not. For example, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are considered to be landmines if they explode solely due to the presence of a person or after being touched. Such IEDs are therefore banned under the Ottawa Treaty.

The 164 countries that have signed the treaty have set themselves the ambitious goal of making the entire globe mine-free by 2025. All participating countries and involved stakeholders still have a lot of work to do if this goal is to be achieved.

## A WILL CAN SAVE LIVES

More and more people would like to have a positive impact in the world even after they die – for example by supporting a charitable organisation. If you would like to help people living in areas with landmines by making a donation in your will, our Managing Director, Gabriela Fuchs, will be happy to provide you with information in a personal and confidential discussion (info@wom.ch or +44 241 72 30).

## IMPRESSUM

Circulation 20,000, published twice a year  
Text Gabriela Fuchs, Christian Schmidt  
Concept Oliver Gemperle GmbH, Zurich  
Printer: Druckerei Albisrieden, Zurich  
Paper Cyclus Print, 100% recycled paper

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Account for donations 87-415116-3



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