

WORLD WITHOUT MINES

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NEWSLETTER

MICHELINE YAISIMBA, DEMINER



Photo: Afrilam

Manual preparations: Before the actual work of demining can begin, needle probes and metal detectors are used to determine the presence of explosive ordnance in the ground.

„It’s a good feeling knowing that you are saving lives.“

Micheline Yaisimba, who lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the managing director of Afrilam with a team of 22 staff. Yaisimba became a deminer in part because of a tragedy that struck her own family.

How did you become a deminer?

In 2005 Handicap International was looking for demining personnel in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and I applied for their training programme. I passed through all the phases of the recruiting process: preselection, the written qualifying exam and the interview. I was lucky to be selected as a can-

didate. That’s when I got my basic training.

You then went on to get further training in demining.

Yes. I worked for some time as a deminer and then I took further courses in risk sensitisation, analysis of potential minefields and explosive ordnance disposal.

What were the main reasons behind your decision to become a deminer?

First of all, of course, was the desire to help rid ourselves of these „agents of death“. Mines and other remnants of war can cause casualties long after the armed conflict itself has ended, also in Kisangani and surroundings. My own family experienced this first

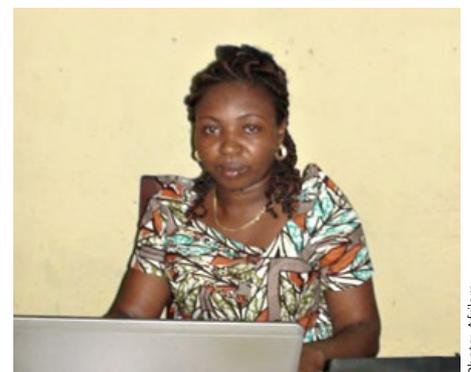


Photo: Afrilam

Micheline Yaisimba, Managing Director of Afrilam, a partner organisation of World Without Mines in the DR Congo.

hand. In June 2000 munition exploded in our house, killing three of my cousins. This terrible accident moved me to take the oath of the deminers: „Fight the battle to save life by being willing to put one’s own life on the line.” Naturally, this takes a lot of courage, but when people’s lives are at stake, it’s what you do. Another motivating factor for me is victim assistance: those who survive a mine explosion want to be able to find a new role for themselves in society – and others learn how prevention can keep such accidents from happening.

Half of Afrilam’s employees are women. How does it feel – as a woman – to head up such an organisation?

My position is the result of the extensive training I have. I am pleased that my training now enables me to help others and that I can pass on my know-how. My position also provides me the opportunity to counteract the general discrediting of women we see in Africa. All too often women here are regarded as generally incompetent and incapable. I hope that my example will inspire other women.

How could mine clearance be improved in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in your opinion?

There are in fact still a number of deficits in this area. Our biggest concern is procuring the financial resources we need, especially because the topic of „Mine Action” is neglected in the government budget and even the national landmine authority receives too little financing. Consequently, we are dependent



In addition to clearing landmines, Afrilam also works to sensitise the public about the problem of landmines and inform inhabitants of remote villages about landmine hazards.

on aid from abroad. In addition, transport routes in the Democratic Republic of Congo are in such poor condition that the work of the mine clearing teams is compromised.

Have you had any experiences during your mine clearing work that you remember in particular?

Yes, the first time I discovered a landmine. I was working that day in a risk zone, which means that the metal detector had already indicated that a landmine must be buried somewhere nearby. I was searching for the mine manually with a probe. I was able to localise it and started carefully digging it up. I was shocked when I recognised the model. It was a PMA2 anti-personnel mine from the former Yugoslavia – an extremely dangerous type of landmine. I immediately felt myself gripped with fear: „mine – danger – explosion!” But, after a few seconds, I managed to calm myself down and I called my team leader. Then, together we defused the mine according to the specified procedures.

This was the day I won my first battle against a landmine and saved someone’s life. That was a great feeling.



„Without demining, it is impossible for agriculture to flourish.”

Ueli Müller, Town Council President of Illnau-Effretikon

Every year the town of Illnau-Effretikon grants substantial financial awards to selected development projects. In 2015 World Without Mines received CHF 50,000 for its „Balici” project, which covers more than half the project’s costs.

Mr Müller, this year the geographic focus of the projects being supported is in Southeast Europe. What are the needs of this region as you see it?

In ex-Yugoslavia there is still damage remaining from the wars in the 1990s. Agriculture and infrastructure have to be rebuilt. A shared social life also has to be newly organised.

What criteria must a project fulfil to be selected by Illnau-Effretikon?

The projects have to be well-documented and have a sound procedural and financing plan. It is also important that we have a relationship of trust with the aid organisation.

What, in your opinion, are the benefits of demining in Bosnia-Herzegovina?

Demining makes it safer for the people living there. The population has to be able to use the fields, meadows and forests to sustain themselves and earn a living. Only once the area has been cleared of landmines can agriculture be resumed.

Your town, like many others, is under significant pressure to save and keep costs low. How is it possible for you to nevertheless continue supporting development aid efforts?

For more than 40 years we have had a tradition of providing aid both at home and abroad, even though we are not a very wealthy community. By working together with the national churches and the association Solidarbasar we are able to make substantial donations that can make a real difference. The will to show financial solidarity has been strong among the

members of our town council and parliament, but the growing pressure to save is making it harder to uphold the town’s contributions.



After demining: farmers and their families can return to the land.

Raspberries take the place of landmines

World Without Mines has been at work in the community of Donji Vakuf since 2005 and has demined an area of 700,000 square metres. Clearing the Balici minefields was a big challenge due to the hillside situation and overgrowth of vegetation. 79,668 square metres were meticulously checked with metal detectors – 15 unexploded ordnance devices were found as well as 31 anti-personnel mines, including one extremely dangerous blast mine. Now Balici is ready again for agriculture.

The work of World Without Mines is bearing fruit, as exemplified by the nearby minefield of Rosulije, which was demined last year. A family has already planted out 5,000 square metres of this field with raspberries and aronia berries, which will generate a substantial income for them and allow them to enlarge the plantation.



I'm leaving behind a better world.

A growing number of people today want to do good and support a charitable organisation after their death. This raises many questions that have to be addressed: What options exist for including charitable organisations in my will? How do I formulate a proper will? What portion of the inheritance is available for me to freely dispose of?

MyHappyEnd is an association dedicated to raising awareness in the Swiss population for issues and possibilities regarding one's last will and testament. It is a joint endeavour of 20 reputable non-profit organisations whose goal is to break down the taboos surrounding the topic of inheritance and gifting, because tremendous potential exists to do good when one formulates a will. Yet, only about one fourth of the Swiss population aged 45 and older has a will.

The website of MyHappyEnd offers a guide on drawing up a will and a tool called „Check your will” – with just a few clicks of the mouse you can find out how your assets can be apportioned for inheritance purposes depending on your specific personal situation.

Your will can save lives after you are gone.

If you are interested in making a gift through your will that will help people in places where mines are still a problem, our co-managing directors Gabriela Fuchs and Sandra Montagne would be pleased to provide you with information in a confidential talk (info@wom.ch or +41 44 241 72 30).

Revision of inheritance law?

Inheritance and gifting are currently topics of political and public discussion. In June 2015, Swiss voters rejected an initiative to modify Swiss inheritance taxation. Consequently, a revision of Switzerland's inheritance law is currently under consideration, in response to a motion launched by Felix Gutzwiller in 2010 to modernise Swiss inheritance law.

The proposed revision aims to adjust the current law on inheritance and mandatory apportionments, which is over 100 years old, so as to reflect the realities of life today, for instance by easing the strict rules governing the compulsory apportionment of inheritance assets and addressing preference given to parents and the clear shortcomings in the law when it comes to modern forms of cohabitation.

MyHappyEnd deals with issues surrounding inheritance law on a daily basis. MyHappyEnd and its co-members are working to ensure that people are informed about all their options under inheritance law when they draw up their last will and testament. Today, only 1 to 1.5 percent of all inherited assets are bequeathed to charitable organisations. „A revised inheritance law could motivate people and make it easier for them to bequeath part of their estate to charitable organisations,” notes Muriel Bonnardin Wethmar, President of MyHappyEnd.

myhappyend.org

Web links:

www.myhappyend.org/ratgeber

www.myhappyend.org/testament-check

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