



# WORLD WITHOUT MINES

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# NEWSLETTER

INTERVIEW: 20 YEARS OF WORLD WITHOUT MINES



In 1997, Claudine Bolay and Emanuel Christen, together with Monique Bolay, established the World Without Mines Foundation.

## „We show solidarity“

**20 years of World Without Mines. President of the Board Claudine Bolay and Board member Emanuel Christen look back.**

*It's really just down to chance that World Without Mines exists.*

**Claudine Bolay:** Yes. I heard on the grapevine that Emanuel Christen was giving a talk about land mines. At that time, in 1997, Emanuel was working for the ICRC, making prostheses for the victims of accidents with land mines. He had seen and experienced a lot, too much. Now he was committed to fighting against these perfidious weapons. I myself knew nothing about the subject, but I was very impressed by Emanuel's talk. Afterwards, I called him and asked whether he would be interested in working together.

**Emanuel Christen:** Of course I was interested. My prosthe-

ses were good, but it would be so much better to make them unnecessary – i.e. to defuse the mines before they caused any injury.

*What were the next steps?*

**Bolay:** My sister Monique, Emanuel and I set up the World Without Mines Foundation. The first thing we did was address the problem of a village in Mozambique that had been surrounded by a ring of land mines for many years and had no chance of a future.

*Actually, it's incredible that private organisations have to take action. Clearing the mines should be the responsibility of the armies that were involved, or at least the governments of those countries.*

**Christen:** Yes, it's true. But we do it because we want to show solidarity with the people who are affected. Once you have seen what it means to live surrounded by mines, you can't do anything other than help.

**Bolay:** What's more, most mine clearance organisations only deal with densely populated areas. The more remote regions are left to their own devices. But it is precisely those

regions which are most dependent on outside help, because the people there are poor and are threatened with starvation if they can't access their land. So that's why we concentrate on those regions.

*When you look back, which project do you remember most of all?*

**Bolay:** I went to Bosnia in the year 2000, five years after the end of the war. I was very shocked when I found just how many mines there were. I had to be careful at every step; my life was in constant danger. I was equally affected by a journey through Laos. I saw farmers and their sons looking for cluster munitions from the Vietnam War. That's right: three decades after the end of the war. Their equipment was very primitive. It was obvious that some of them would not survive. So we work very hard in both those countries.

*Since then, World Without Mines has cleared an area equivalent to a strip one metre wide and 10,500 kilometres long – the distance from Zurich to Singapore.*

**Bolay:** We owe this success to our donors. It is only thanks to their generosity that we can achieve so much. Thousands of



**„I can't help all the victims, but I can support a great many individuals. That is really important. Every individual outcome counts.”**

Emanuel Christen

people have now regained their livelihoods – they can fetch water, farm their land and gather firewood and their children can go to school. At the same time, we are also able to help some of the victims to earn a living. In its mine clearance work, World Without Mines always uses local experts from the countries in question. That's an important side benefit of our work.

*Despite the global campaign against land mines, the annual number of victims of mines is currently rising dramatically, by 75% in 2015 alone. The main reason is the wars in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. In addition, the biggest sponsors of mine clearance – the USA, Norway, Japan, Germany and Australia – have reduced their commitment by about a quarter. What do you have to say about that?*

**Christen:** When I joined the ICRC in the 70s, I was very soon ready to give up. I was making prostheses, but the numbers of the injured were increasing all the time. It was a Sisyphean task. Then one of my colleagues said something to me that I have never forgotten: „Either you are broken by the misery, or you break the misery itself.” He was so right. I can't help all the victims, but I can support a great many individuals. That is really important. Every individual outcome counts.

**THE FOUNDATION BOARD**

The Board of World Without Mines currently has the following members:

- Claudine Bolay Zraggen
- Emanuel Christen
- Henriette Eppenberger
- Thomas Fluri
- Carol Hofer
- Reto Nigg
- Christian Schmidt

**Bolay:** It's the same for me. When I see what we are achieving in concrete terms, it keeps on giving me hope – and it motivates me, too. But I admit, it's not always easy.

*But there is good news, too. In February 2017, Algeria announced that it had cleared its last land mines and a little later Belarus – nine years late – completed the destruction of 3.4 million stockpiled land mines.*

**Bolay:** That encourages us, and gives us hope. In any case, World Without Mines will continue its work. We are involved in some very important projects, are highly regarded and have excellent connections.

**Christen:** I feel very optimistic about the future. If we have managed to clear a distance of over 10,000 kilometres since we began, as far as Singapore, then I hope that in the next twenty years we'll get right around the globe ...

**20 years of World Without Mines in figures:**

**10,549,355 square metres** of land demined

**200,000 people** informed about the risk from mines and other residue of war

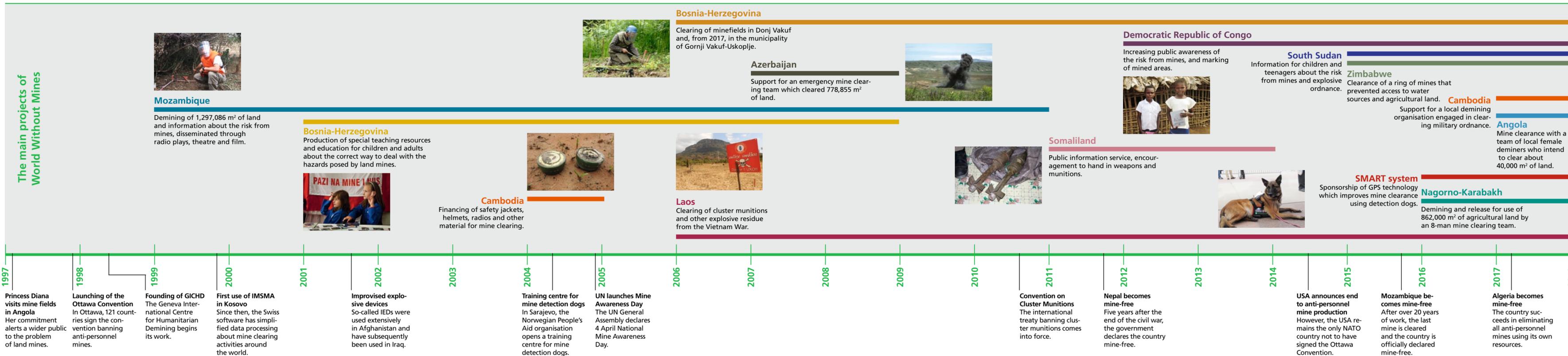
**7,186,367 Swiss francs** invested in mine clearance and awareness-raising projects

**50,000 explosive devices** made safe

**12 countries** made more secure

**15,000 hours** of unpaid work by the Foundation Board

**41,595 sponsors** have made donations to help World Without Mines





Eliminating a hazard: before a new school could be built in Khok, the site had to be cleared of cluster munitions.

## Education thanks to demining

Laos is regarded as one of the poorest countries in South-East Asia. However, in recent years the economy has been experiencing an upturn. The work of World Without Mines has helped in this.

After the end of the Vietnam War, over 80 million unexploded bombs, mines and other explosive ordnance remained in Laos. That is why, since 2008, World Without Mines has been working with a local organisation called UXO Lao, and its commitment has contributed to some major successes in the province of Khammouane.

One example is the new secondary school in the village of Khok. Because the old school was too small to accommodate all the pupils, many children had to travel 16 kilometres to the nearest town for their education. When, in autumn 2015, the local education authority secured funding to extend the school building, UXO Lao was commissioned with demining the site.

The team conducted a painstaking search of 19,000 square metres of the school site and found 52 so-called „bombies” (BLU-26 cluster munitions). Once they had been destroyed, the school building could safely be extended by four extra classrooms. The new wing has been open since October 2016 and means that 78 pupils can be educated close to home. The parents, children and teachers in the village of Khok are very happy about this and would like to thank the sponsors of World Without Mines for their generous assistance.

### Here's what World Without Mines has achieved in Khammouane Province:

- 6,450,179 square metres of land cleared, over 80% of it agricultural land
- 23,978 cluster munitions removed
- 45,585 people can now use the cleared land
- 55,423 people have been trained in how to handle cluster munitions
- 26 schools and 17 infrastructure buildings like hospitals, markets and community buildings have been constructed thanks to the demining.

Please support our mission against mines and cluster munitions by making a donation.

Thank you very much!



For the children it's a game, for the adults a secure livelihood: raspberry harvest in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## Raspberries are top exports

Our work shows how former minefields can contribute to an economic upturn.

There have been some changes in Bosnia-Herzegovina: fields of berries, fruit and vegetables now dominate the landscape. Raspberries have even become a leading export. The country, whose economic growth is still essentially sluggish, is now among the top ten raspberry-exporting countries in the world. In figures: annual production has increased from 700 tonnes in 2004 to about 20,000 tonnes, of which 90% is exported.

We have played our part in this success. Since 2005, World Without Mines has cleared mines from about a million square metres of land in the municipality of Donji Vakuf. Today there are more than 750 farming families here, and 110 of them grow soft fruit. According to the chairman of the local council, Huso Sušić, more and more families are getting involved in this promising industry.

So when frozen raspberries appear on the menu in Switzerland, it's quite likely that they were grown on a former minefield.



Photo: GICHD

## Mine-free since 2015

Even 30 years after the war, there were still 200,000 mines in Mozambique. Now the land has been cleared – a big success, not least for World Without Mines.

The very last land mine in Mozambique was destroyed in September 2015 – accompanied by a loud explosion. Like most of the mines, it had been laid close to a strategically important installation. Altogether, over 50 million square metres of land were cleared.

World Without Mines has worked in Mozambique for 11 years and cleared about a million square metres; we have also informed thousands of people about the dangers of mines and other munitions. We would like to thank all our donors for this important success.

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