

# Landmines –

## can we stop the killing fields?

### How landmines hurt



Yieng Choeurn and his father Nge Yowng each lost a leg to landmines

### Not to kill but to maim

In 1985, Chem Phorn, a 40-year-old father was drafted to carry goods for the Cambodian army. He regularly walked barefoot along dirt tracks in the countryside, carrying rations of fish and pork.

One day he was carrying a heavy load. He paused to shift the weight from one shoulder to the other, at a point where the track went round a bend.

“I stepped off the trail onto dry, dead grass. There was a loud explosion and excruciating pain shot up my leg and I fell unconscious,” Chem Phorn remembers.

It was seven hours before he was found and taken to hospital.

By causing injury instead of death, landmines require combatants and health services to divert resources to evacuate the wounded and provide costly medical care. Mines damage the body either by direct blast or by driving fragments, dirt and bacteria into the tissue, often causing severe secondary infections.

### An indiscriminate weapon

With a child’s curiosity, a small girl picked up an unusual object lying on the ground near her village in Angola. Within seconds she learned a cruel lesson. What she had picked up was a “butterfly” mine, which exploded at once. It cost her a hand.

Landmines cannot discriminate between adult and child, soldier and civilian victim. Some look like a colourful plaything to children.

### A long-lasting threat to livelihood

Mao, aged 22, left her Cambodian village home early one morning to collect firewood for her mother.

“I was walking along a path near some ricefields. I went off the path to find some wood, and I noticed some cows grazing nearby.

“A cow started to walk away as I came close. There was a sudden explosion. It had stepped on a landmine. My heart started pounding. I tried to keep calm and think clearly. I called out but no-one heard me.

“I slowly took one step back, trying to remember the way I had come. I took a few more steps. I remember being thrown back...”

**Even when fighting has ceased, farming and every day activities remain unsafe because of landmines.**

### What is a landmine?

Landmines are explosive weapons which are placed on or underneath the ground. Antipersonnel mines will explode when an animal or person – even a small child – steps near or on them, or trips over wires connected to them. This type of mine can be laid by hand, fired from tanks or artillery, or scattered by aircraft. Antivehicle mines require much more pressure – such as from a tank or other vehicle – to detonate. These are usually laid by hand.

Other kinds of explosive devices are just as much of a hazard as landmines, such as grenades and bombs which do not explode on impact but remain in the ground. These are called unexploded ordnances, or UXOs.



A banner used in Angola to teach people about landmines

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### The story of a deadly weapon

The development of landmines and moves to ban them

#### Timeline

1916-18 Precursors to landmines: artillery shells buried with exposed fuses, to block the advance of tanks during World War I

1939-45 Anti-tank mines widely used by all sides during World War 2; smaller anti-personnel mines also developed

1960s "Scatterable" mines invented and dropped from planes during the Vietnam War

1970s Pressure by International Committee of the Red Cross for governments to increase restrictions on injurious weapons

1980 UN Inhumane Weapons Convention prohibiting the use of landmines but leaving major loopholes (especially concerning the delayed effects of landmines)

1992 Launch of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines [ICBL], which by 1999 brings together over 1300 groups in over 75 countries to work locally and internationally

1997 "Ottawa Convention" (also known as the Mine Ban Treaty) stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines — signed by 122 states including Australia

1997 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Jody Williams and ICBL

1999 (January) Ottawa Convention ratified by Australia

1999 (1 March) Ottawa Convention (signed by 133 states, ratified by 65) enters into force worldwide

1999 (October) Australia destroys its stockpile of antipersonnel mines. More are found and destroyed in November 2000

2002 The Australian Government's Destroy-A-Minefield campaign, managed by World Vision, comes to an end in December

2002 The Landmine Monitor Report announces that stockpiles have reduced and there are fewer new mine victims, but expresses concern that India and Pakistan are laying new mines and that global mine action funding has stagnated

## Where are the landmines?

It is believed there are 60 to 70 million mines in place around the world. Just a handful of mines — or the mere suspicion that an area is mined — can make that land unusable for human activity.

Countries severely affected by mines include:	Countries producing anti-personnel mines	Countries with large stockpiles of mines
<p><b>Africa:</b> Angola Mozambique Somalia Sudan Eritrea Ethiopia</p> <p><b>Latin America:</b> Colombia Nicaragua</p> <p><b>Asia/Pacific:</b> Cambodia Afghanistan China* Vietnam Thailand* Sri Lanka (Jaffna peninsula) Laos Burma [*along borders]</p> <p><b>Europe/Central Asia:</b> Bosnia Croatia Chechnya (Russia) Georgia Azerbaijan Kosovo (FR Yugoslavia)</p> <p><b>Middle East:</b> Iraq Egypt</p>	<p>Burma China Cuba Egypt India Iran Iraq North Korea South Korea Pakistan Russia Singapore United States Vietnam</p> <p><i>[several have not manufactured mines for some time, but they have refused to make formal statements against production]</i></p>	<p>China, Russia Belarus USA Ukraine India South Korea</p> <p><i>probably also:</i> Iran Iraq FR Yugoslavia Pakistan Egypt Israel Greece Vietnam Angola</p>

## What can be done about landmines?

A major breakthrough in the campaign against these deadly weapons was the signing in 1997 of the Ottawa Convention which outlaws stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. Australia was among the first countries to sign the convention, which it ratified in 1999.

In February 2003, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines reported that 38 State Parties to the convention had destroyed their stockpiles, including Australia, Croatia, Zimbabwe and Guatemala. Another 16, including Thailand and Brazil, are in the process of destroying their stockpiles. As at June 2003, 134 countries are party to the Ottawa Convention and a further 13 have signed but not ratified it. Countries which have not signed the Convention include China, Russia and the United States.

For as long as landmines exist anywhere there is also important work to be done to protect communities and assist survivors. Governments and non-government organisations are active in a variety of ways.

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Warning signs alert communities to the presence of minefields

### Mines awareness : Learning to live safely

In countries where live landmines and UXO remain widespread, lives can be saved by teaching people how to recognise the different kinds of mine, and what to do if they find one.

In Cambodia, World Vision is implementing the Integrated Mine Action Program (IMAP). This integrated approach to tackling landmines, which includes mine clearance, victim assistance, community development and mine awareness training, is aimed at reducing the pressures which force vulnerable people to take increased risks in order to survive. Vulnerable groups include – but are not limited to - children, women and families new to the area.

Mine awareness education is tailored to the needs of the different genders, ages and social groups represented. World Vision's mines awareness training uses the International Guidelines for Landmine and Unexploded Ordnance Awareness Education.

### Mine clearance

The task of clearing mines is much slower and more costly than the manufacture and laying of mines. It can cost from A\$450 to A\$1350 to clear one mine, compared with A\$4.50 to buy it.

While paths can be cleared by (expensive) heavy machinery to allow an army to pass, making an area safe for the civilian population requires that every mine be removed.

**Locating the minefields** is the first challenge:

- Maps are rarely available or accurate — mines may be laid and re-laid.
- Smaller mines shift during flooding.
- Talking with local people is a key source of information.

**Locating and destroying every mine** is even more time-consuming:

There are not yet easy ways to locate and detonate mines at a distance or en masse.

- Many newer mines are plastic and don't activate metal detectors.
- Many detectors produce a high rate of false alarms.
- Sniffer dogs can detect up to 95% of recently laid mines, but require special training and suitable weather and can only work for a few hours at a time.
- Machines such as flails, rollers and ploughs require firm level ground and do not destroy every mine in a field.
- Using explosives to detonate the mines causes too much damage to the land, and may displace mines instead of destroying them.
- The most promising technological solutions rely on electromagnetic impulse, ground-penetrating radar, or infrared imagery, but these are still being developed and most will be too expensive for widespread use.

Often deminers must work 40 cm at a time, using hand-held metal detectors to locate potential mines and then a probing rod and trowel to find and uncover the suspicious object. The work is boring and tiring.

Given the slowness of mine clearance, an important decision is which areas to clear first: for example, clearing the approaches to a bridge may restore a whole province's access to a hospital.



Demining is a slow, painstaking task

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## Helping landmines survivors

Children and adults who are injured by landmines have physical, emotional, social and economic needs.

After the surgeons have done their best to repair horribly mangled bodies, the survivors need rehabilitative services such as physiotherapy and retraining to cope with loss of eyesight, hearing or mobility. Some may need crutches or artificial limbs. The most appropriate prosthetic devices are made locally, because they are cheaper, easier to modify or replace (every few years) and designed to match skin colour – and because ill-fitting limbs lead to other serious complications. In addition, the patient may need appropriate orthotics such as modified shoes. World Vision and AusAID are supporting a program to manufacture polypropylene limbs, and upgrade the training of prosthetists (makers of artificial limbs) in Laos.

While artificial limbs are a visible need, it is just as vital for the person to be assisted to return to as normal a life as possible. Children need to be able to attend school, take part in games or sport, and help with chores. Adults need to earn their own income or help to support the family, but jobs such as farming or fetching water may be very difficult.

World Vision has supported projects providing training in new skills such as radio and television repairs in places like Battambang in Cambodia.



Chem Phorn (see page 1) learning motorcycle maintenance]

Many landmine survivors say their greatest need is for acceptance by others in their family or community. Changing attitudes about disability is a key part of this process. Survivors who have made progress towards recovery can provide important peer support.

## Advocacy

While the international ban on landmines is a major achievement, the task remains of ensuring that more countries accede to the treaty, and that signatory governments honour their commitments. (Check which countries have already signed, on the Web at [www.minesactioncanada.com](http://www.minesactioncanada.com).)

The public can also continue to campaign for appropriate funding of mine clearance and long-term assistance to landmine victims.

### Useful web sites to keep up-to-date:

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines -  
[www.icbl.org](http://www.icbl.org) or [www.australia.icbl.org](http://www.australia.icbl.org)  
Mines Action Canada  
[www.minesactioncanada.com](http://www.minesactioncanada.com)

## Action you can take

- **Let others know** about the damage done by landmines. Perhaps you could even plant “landmines” down the corridors of your school, office or church, then perform a short skit or hand out information drawing attention to landmine victims.
- **Write** a letter to your federal MP, encouraging him/her to urge the Australian government to do all it can to remove the curse of landmines. Keep up-to-date about the international campaign to ban landmines by joining World Vision’s Action Network. Write also to embassies of non-signatory countries, urging them to accede to the treaty.
- **Think about** the dangers which could hurt children (or adults) in your home or neighbourhood (e.g. poisons, dangerous wires, boiling water, unfenced swimming pools). What steps could you take to help protect children from these hazards?
- **Discuss:** Are weapons designed to frighten or maim somehow “better” than others which are designed to kill? Why or why not? What values are important to you in responding to the issue of landmines?

### Notes on sources

This report draws on reports and photos from World Vision colleagues in Cambodia, Angola and Laos, as well as from the ICBL and its Australian network.  
The main source: *Landmine Monitor Report 1999: Toward a Mine-Free World – executive summary and Landmine Monitor Report 2002.*

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