

# Witness

an online magazine

A photograph showing four individuals engaged in landmine clearance work in a field of tall, dry grass. They are wearing protective suits and clear face shields. The person in the foreground is wearing a red and blue suit and is using a tool to dig in the grass. The other three individuals are further back, also working in the field. The sky is blue with some clouds.

## The Terror Beneath

Confronting the Crisis of Landmines

Photographs by Craig Stennett

Text by Craig Stennett & Richard Falco

# The Terror Beneath

## Confronting the Crisis of Landmines

Text by Craig Stennett & Richard Falco

Landmines distinguish themselves because once they have been sown, once the soldier walks away from the weapon, the landmine cannot tell the difference between a soldier or a civilian - a woman, a child, a grandmother going out to collect firewood to make the family meal. The crux of the problem is ... once peace is declared the landmine does not recognize that peace. The landmine is eternally prepared to take victims ... it is the perfect soldier, the “eternal sentry.” The war ends, the landmine goes on killing.

Jody Williams – Nobel Peace Laureate - 1997

It is deployment day at the HALO Trust’s compound in the Zimpeto District of northern Maputo, Mozambique. The day is fondly described in the national tongue of Portuguese as the day of “confusão” (confusion). Fifteen of the twenty-six demining sections have just returned from their eight-day leave and are about to embark on three weeks living and working in one of Mozambique’s remaining 139 minefields in what is widely acknowledged as one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, that of being a deminer.

It’s still the rainy season but today there is nothing but brilliant sunshine and an intense wilting African heat. Helen Gray, a thirty-year-old resourceful Scot, raised on an East Lothian farm and educated at George Watson’s College in Edinburgh, now Programme Manager for Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization (HALO), pulls into the compound in her Nissan pickup and surveys the scene. Leaving her vehicle and making her way across the compound on foot she is greeted by a blur of activity. Landrovers and trucks are being refuelled, tents and sleeping bags are being loaded, and stores are emptied of food and the essential demining kit the teams will need for the near month they spend in the field. After several hours they’re ready for their deployment throughout Maputo province and leave the relative safety of

HALO’s Head Quarters, being checked off by security guards as each vehicle drives out of the compound.

Helen has just returned from taking Susan Eckey, the Deputy Director General of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, and her accompanying delegation on a fact-finding mission in the HALO minefields. One of the two all-women section’s HALO employs had extended their days in the field demining to accommodate the Norwegians visit and will now redeploy later in the week.



Deployment day at HALO’s Zimpeto compound in Maputo, Mozambique.



Vehicles are loaded at the HALO Zimpeto compound headquarters in Maputo, Mozambique. After loading their Landrover, the team will travel to “Damo” camp to begin work.  
Women Deminers (L to R) are: Amelia Zulmira, Helena Wetela, and Luisa Chelene.



Casualty of “Mubobo” minefield. The victim had probably been alone scavenging for metal to sell when he set off one of the mines.

Mankind’s thirst for war has always lead to a race as to who can develop the most effective killing machines. Over time, that process has produced and integrated weapons from the barbarically crude to the most sophisticated of devices. The landmine is just another tool in that arsenal of death.

The toll of these weapons is usually measured in the impact they have on armies and the soldiers of conflict. The true tragedy is that the civilian population is a secondary consideration as to the use of these weapons, particularly the landmine. The consequence of these decisions is a humanitarian tragedy for the innocent victims of war and conflict. These unintended statistics, whose names are often not recorded, live in fear and grieve in silence.

According the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the very first landmines were used in the 15th century at the battle of Agincourt in France. In the 19th century, landmines were used during the American Civil War by the Confederates, and by late World War I landmines were being used by most major armies. One reason for the increased use of landmines is that

they are extremely inexpensive to produce; however, they are very expensive to detect and defuse once they have been sown. <sup>1</sup>

Antipersonnel weapons, or landmines as they are better known, are explosive materials set up to detonate on contact. They are designed to incapacitate or kill an individual or destroy a vehicle through damage caused by the blast. They are generally buried below the earth’s surface, or laid above ground and camouflaged. There are over 600 different types of antipersonnel landmines. These devices are designed and adapted to work in different environments with different goals. A buried landmine can remain active for over fifty years.

Between 1918 and 1939 the development and use of the antipersonnel mine became a priority among military strategists and it was widely used. At this time its use was, on the whole, controlled and targeted at soldiers and linked to specific military objectives. It wasn’t until the 1960s that the random dissemination of mines began.<sup>2</sup>

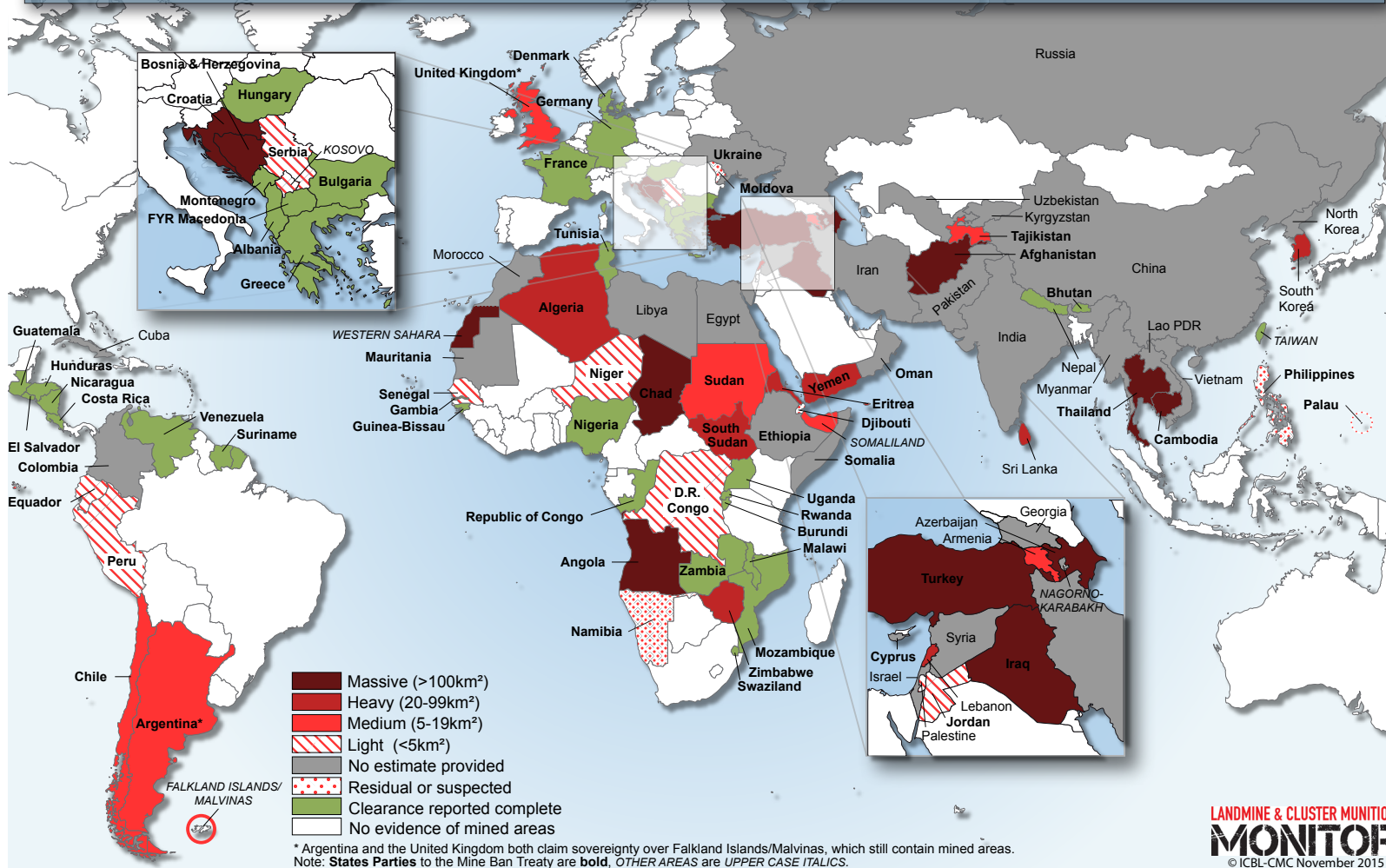
1. “Landmines,” NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace & Security, <http://disarm.igc.org>

2. “Facts About Landmines, History of the Weapon,” CARE.org, October 16, 2003



A pentolite fuse and charge laid next to a Russian Federation Antipersonnel Blast Mine.

## Mine Contamination as of November 2015



### CARE INFORMATION ON LANDMINES

There are estimated to be around 110 million antipersonnel mines in the ground and another 100 million stockpiled around the world.<sup>3</sup>

#### Worst affected areas:

Afghanistan  
 Angola  
 Cambodia  
 Iraq  
 Laos

#### Serious problems in:

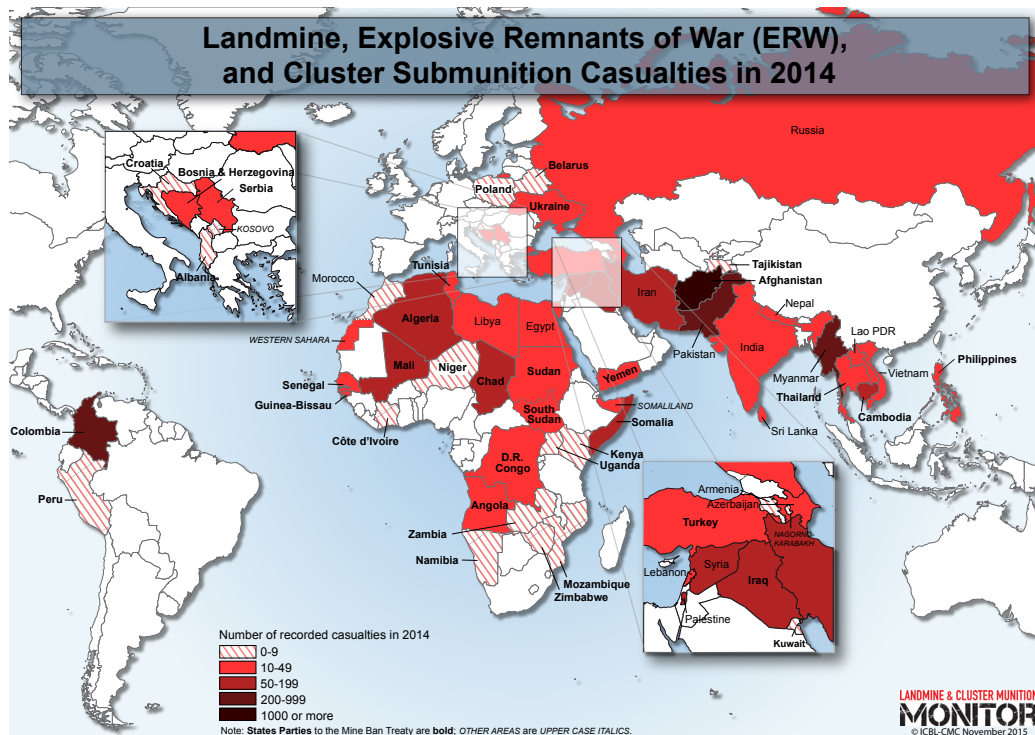
Bosnia  
 Croatia  
 Georgia  
 Mozambique  
 Myanmar  
 Nicaragua  
 Somalia  
 Sri Lanka  
 Sudan

Today it is estimated that there are over 110 million antipersonnel mines in seventy countries. The majority of these countries are in the developing world which do not have resources to remove the mines or care for the tens of thousands of victims injured by the explosions, the majority of whom are women and children. This is a global humanitarian crisis. Approximately one

million people have been killed and maimed by antipersonnel mines. There are over 26,000 victims each year: that's, 70 people a day, or around one person every fifteen minutes.<sup>4</sup>

3. "Facts About Landmines," History of the Weapon, CARE.org, October 16, 2003

4. CARE.org, <http://www.care.org/emergencies/facts-about-landmines>



Realizing the severity of the situation a number of organizations around the world set out to try and address this issue. Led by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), founded by Jody Williams, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work, over 1,000 organizations and the representatives of 120 countries came together to negotiate a treaty prohibiting landmines. To date, 135 governments have signed that treaty. The treaty prohibits the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of antipersonnel mines and on their destruction. However, well over 10 million stockpiled mines await destruction. Massive tracts of land are still infested and thus too dangerous for productive use. Tens of thousands of victims and their families have not yet received adequate support. The presence of mines continues to impede social and economic development. The United Nations Secretary General estimated that it would cost more than \$50 billion to remove all the landmines throughout the world.<sup>5</sup>

5. "United Nations Disarmament of Landmines," UN.org, <http://www.un.org/disarmament/convarms/landmines>





HALO Supervisor, Arcillia Adriano (center), was called to a site near Damo minefield where a 28-year-old cattle herder had his leg blown off by a mine three days earlier. HALO will now survey this area also. Two other HALO deminers accompany her and Paulino D’Uambo (far left), who was the cattle herders boss and brought the situation to HALO’s attention. Maputo Province, Mozambique.



A Russian Federation PMN Antipersonnel Blast Mine detected by HALO deminers at “Mubobo” minefield, Maputo Province, Mozambique. Laid some thirty years ago the mines still remain active. It was later destroyed with a pentolite charge.



Survey Supervisor, Aziz Faria, talks about the dangers of UXB’s (unexploded bombs) and mines to the villagers of Chobela, Maputo Province, Mozambique. Informing villagers about the dangers of mines and how to prevent injuries is an important part of the team’s educational efforts.



Aziz Faria talks to the villagers of Tlimo, Mozambique, about the dangers of mines. Aziz is part of the survey team. HALO's survey teams will visit every village in Mozambique to access if they are now mine-free.





Helen Gray (front), Program Manager for the HALO Trust in Mozambique, with the women's section in the Damo minefield, Maputo Province, Mozambique.

HALO is a non-profit non-governmental organization whose head office's are in Dumfries, Scotland. Its singular mandate is to remove landmines and unexploded ordinance from all the nine country's it operates in. It deployed its first demining team in Mozambique on 20 February 1994 and has now declared the countries six northern provinces mine-free, leaving only the south to be dealt with. Helen Gray has worked for the organization since 2004 doing her initial six month training in Cabo Delgado on the northern border of Mozambique. These mine fields were laid in the early 1970s. HALO removed 80,000 mines from this area alone. This was then followed by deployment to Angola and a return to Mozambique in January 2008. In February 2009, Gray was tasked with running the country's operations, with responsibility for all its 370 staff in their demining activities and an accompanying 3 million US dollar budget.



Program Manager Helen Gray, checking paperwork at Damo minefield with Supervisor Arcillia Adriano.



Helen Gray shows the pentolite charge that will be used to destroy a Russian Federation PMN mine in the "Mubobo" minefield.

After finishing her Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology and Anthropology at Durham University, Gray worked as an environmental interpreter for the Scottish Sea Bird center and then as an expedition's guide in Peru's threatened rainforests. On her return to Britain she speculatively sent her CV into HALO. Her neighbor had told her about the organization and she had also decided herself that she wanted to now work with an NGO in a humanitarian field.

"My job gives me tremendous satisfaction. It's brilliant to be able to deploy deminers into an area where there's a problem with minefields. After handing it back to the local community you can return in a couple of months and you can see maize growing there or there's houses or schools that have been built and the problem of mines has gone, forever. You don't get that level of reward from many jobs," Helen remarks. When prompted to recall day one in a minefield, she continues, "I remember my first day demining up on the northern border project between Mozambique and Tanzania and I really wanted to find a mine. The drill we learn is very systematic and repetitive and as I'd done all the training, I didn't want to spend 20 minutes after finding a



HALO team prepares for a day of demining in the Damo minefield. Maputo Province, Mozambique.



Helen Gray coordinates the field operations with her team prior to any deployment.

metal signal carefully scrapping and excavating my way towards a Coke can! I wanted to find a mine.” As part of her job, Helen has gone through all the appropriate levels of training within HALO. “It’s better when your relating to the deminers, paramedics, or mechanics that you’ve experienced their jobs yourself, first hand. You’ve been through the training and worked on the ground yourself.” She adds, “Discovering my first mine was a reality check. People stand on these and they lose their legs, they lose their lives. Mines are particularly horrible as they do not discriminate against old or young, male or female. They lie in the ground just waiting. I still to this day enter minefields and think, my god whats the impact here. What’s that village doing so close?”

It’s this level of commitment that allows Helen and her staff to tackle the mine clearance Mozambique so desperately needs. A country that after twenty years of an initial armed liberation struggle with its colonial power Portugal was followed by an internal civil war between Frelimo, now the

government, and Renamo, which was secretly backed by Rhodesia and later South Africa.

An effective cease-fire came into force between the warring factions on 15 October 1992 and it has stuck to this day. Its legacy, however, was 900,000 deaths during the fighting, five million displaced persons, and an estimated 200,000 landmines deployed by all sides in the conflict.

HALO is probably most famously linked in the public’s collective memory with an iconic image of the late Princess Diana in a minefield. In January 1997, the last year of her life, Diana visited a HALO minefield on the outskirts of Huambo City in Angola. The images were seen worldwide and with the accompanying publicity the Princess brought to the issue of the use of land mines and the need for their clearance has been credited with influencing the signing of the Ottawa Treaty, of which there are 156 signatories. It created an international ban on the use of Antipersonnel Mines and the need for their removal from the 70 countries they still present a danger to.

“Diana was visiting the International Committee of The Red Cross in Angola when they suggested to her that she should visit one of our minefields,” Gray recalls. “The Princess brought fantastic visibility to the need for humanitarian mine clearance and the issue of mine use.” Helen accompanied Diana’s son, Prince Harry, in 2010 when he visited the once densely-laid minefield around the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric dam. Helen had led the team which removed some 32,000 mines from that area, reuniting villages that were literally cut in two by the deployment of the mines. “I spent two days with Prince Harry in Tete province showing him the work HALO had done to clear this incredibly dense mine line. He met the local community and victims of the mines and showed the same humanity and empathy his late mother was renowned for.”

The ten strong women’s team has been awake since 4:30 a.m. as work starts in the minefields. They enter the fields at first light finishing at 1:00 in the afternoon, with a ten minute break every hour. Their sister team of another ten women is close by, demining directly under the new high voltage electricity pylons. Their working day is dictated by the need to avoid the worst of the heat. Nevertheless, temperatures can soar to between 90-100



Demining in the Damo minefield. Long grass has to be first carefully removed before the mine detectors can be brought into operation. It is hard, slow, and laborious work.



Locating the mines is the first step to all field operations.

degrees Fahrenheit, producing a punishing environment in which it is hard to maintain physical strength and concentration - two elements crucial for deminers alongside strict adherence to all the operating procedures they have been trained to follow.

The first women's section was formed within HALO in 2007. "The perception in Mozambique was that demining was a job done by men. When HALO was recruiting people, we started to state quite clearly that applications were welcome from women and men and we found that many women applied. In the two years since the employment of women deminers began, they have done incredibly well being promoted through our system," Gray explains.

Twenty-eight year old Supervisor Domingas Lacrimosa Lina Dias, a tall purposeful woman, adds, "With us working here, the country rids itself of mines. I feel proud to be doing this job of clearing mines as a woman. It was a job that in Mozambique was seen as men's work, but now I am proving different."

Helen's mobile is ringing; when she answers she is informed that they're ready for the destruction of a landmine at Mubobo minefield a few kilometers up the road. Mubobo is the most heavily mined area remaining in Maputo province. The Frelimo government laid it during the civil war to impede sabotage of the vital pylons providing the capital, Maputo, with its only electricity supplied from the huge Cahora Bassa hydro-electric dam.

Twenty-two year old section supervisor Onorio Manuel meets Gray on our arrival. He formally briefs her on the situation in the minefield from the safety of the designated control point, which is part of HALO's standard operating procedures at all its sites whenever and wherever they are visited in the world. After Kevlar flak jackets and ballistic visors are donned, the section supervisor starts to prime a pentolite explosive charge needed to destroy a Russian Federation PMN mine they have detected up in the field near one of the electricity pylons.



Onorio Manuel prepares to place a pentolite charge next to a Russian Federation Mine.



Flora Amando with Supervisor Arcillia Adriano, demining in Damo minefield. The red sticks indicate the areas not to cross.



HALO Operation Manager Lordes Zavale, Program Manager Helen Gray and Supervisor Onorio Manuel watch the pentolite charge set off the PMN Antipersonnel Blast Mine in Mubobo minefield.



“It is HALO policy to destroy every mine and each piece of unexploded ordinance it discovers. Then it is irretrievably gone, for all time,” Gray explains as she monitors Onorio’s progress with the explosive charge.

The two walk slowly up into the minefield, the safe zones being clearly marked by red-tipped sticks placed in the ground. “If you’re inside these markers, then you are safe,” Gray points out.

They solemnly pass the skeletal remains of two individuals whose death in this minefield’s passed without ceremony long ago. “They probably were trying to steal metal and stepped on one of the antipersonnel mines planted here. They probably managed to crawl off some distance and then died alone. They are not from the local community and so haven’t been claimed. We’re deciding at HALO and with the locals what we should do with them once we have completely cleared this area,” Gray comments.

A whistle blows, giving the signal for the whole team in the minefield to withdraw to a safe distance as Helen’s section supervisor lays the charge.

“You always do this alone,” Helen explains. “One man, one risk.” A fuse of five minutes has been chosen, ample time for the supervisor to join Helen at one hundred metres from the blast zone deemed safe for this type of landmine.

The minutes are counted down, then the seconds, as the detonation time approaches. The noise of the bang hits you first, followed by the site of a mushroom shaped black plume of smoke pushing its way up into the sky as the explosive charge and the mine itself are destroyed. Then it is all over and Mozambique and Maputo province has one less mine.



All that remains of the Russian federation PMN Antipersonnel Blast Mine at Mubobo mine field, Maputo Province, Mozambique. All metal debris that is found is removed from the minefield.



HALO’s team gathers after a long day of work. The crew will share an evening meal at the Damo camp. In the morning, they will begin again.

# Marshall Legacy Institute Report

[http://marshall-legacy.org/landmine\\_facts/](http://marshall-legacy.org/landmine_facts/)

- 1) Landmine casualties deprive communities and families of income earners and treasured parents, siblings, spouses, and relatives.
- 2) According to the United Nations, approximately 2,000 people are killed or injured by landmines every month.
- 3) Over half the landmine casualties are civilians. Among civilian casualties, more than 40% are children.
- 4) A mine costs between \$3 and \$30. The cost to neutralize a mine is between \$300 and \$1,000 and surgical care costs about \$3,000 per amputee in developing countries.
- 5) Buried landmines can remain active for over fifty years.
- 6) Landmines have injured and killed thousands of U.S. and allied troops in every U.S. conflict since the 1900s, including the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 7) Landmines set in motion a series of events that can lead to environmental damage in the form of soil degradation, deforestation, and the pollution of water resources.
- 8) The U.S. State Department estimates that fewer than one in four landmine amputees is fitted with a proper prosthesis.
- 9) Landmines deprive people in some of the poorest countries of arable land and infrastructure. They cut off access to markets, schools, work, and water.
- 10) Landmines hamper the repatriation of refugees and displaced people.
- 11) Landmines hinder reconstruction, new development, and the delivery of aid.
- 12) Landmine injuries put a great burden on a country's whole health system. People hurt by mines need more antibiotics and more dressings, and they need to stay in the hospital longer than most other patients.
- 13) Female child casualties are often under-reported. In some countries, having a disability is seen as a stigma that needs to be hidden, especially among girls.

This project is a production of

## **CRAIG STENNETT**

Stennett graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Photography from Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham, England. In the late 1980's, Stennett went won the David Hodge Memorial Award for 'Young Photojournalist of the Year' for a story he had covered in Thailand. In the early 1990's, he joined a team of five photographers for the launch of *The European*, a newspaper based in London covering editorial assignments worldwide. After leaving *The European*, he spent a year in Moscow as a photographer for FSP/Gamma. In the mid 1990's, he returned to London to join *The Sunday Telegraph*. Over the years, Stennett has worked as freelance photographer & journalist for *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The Financial Mail*, *Daily & Sunday Telegraph*, and *Readers Digest* as well as other editorial clients. He now lives in Germany working on various projects as a photojournalist.

### **International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)**

<http://www.icbl.org>

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) is a global network of non-governmental organizations, active in around 100 countries, that works for a world free of antipersonnel landmines where landmine survivors can lead fulfilling lives.

### **HALO Trust**

<http://www.halotrust.org>

HALO Trust is the oldest and largest humanitarian landmine clearance organization in the world. For more than two decades we have set the standard for mine clearance through technical innovation and robust management. By doing so we are leading the way in creating a safer future.

## **VISION PROJECT Inc.**

Vision Project is an organization dedicated to the development of investigative journalism, documentary photography, multimedia, film, and education.

The goal of Vision Project is to produce documentary material and educational programs that encourage understanding and awareness about a broad variety of social issues. This information and programming are made available to the general public with a particular focus on members of the younger generation.

Vision Project seeks to reinforce the social, cultural, and historical impact documentary work contributes to society. To reach these goals, we have assembled a group of talented professionals with extensive expertise in journalism, photography, video, design, web technology, and education.

All material copyrighted by Vision Project.

There can be no usage or distribution of this material without the written consent of Vision Project.

Vision Project © 2016

For further information contact:

Vision Project Inc.

P. O. Box 230

North Salem, NY 10560

USA

[www.visionproject.org](http://www.visionproject.org)

[info@visionproject.org](mailto:info@visionproject.org)

(914) 277-2706