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The HALO Trust

By Jessica Jacklin [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

The HALO Trust has actively been working to reduce existing landmines across the globe. Guy Willoughby, the founder of HALO, has focused on creating fast responses to landmine problems. With help from increased donations, HALO will be able to make more countries mine-impact free within the coming years using a variety of techniques.

The HALO Trust (Hazardous Area Life-Support Organization) was founded by Guy Willoughby in 1988 to assist with “humanitarian demining,” an activity and phrase he coined over 21 years ago. Mine contamination stemmed from many international crises, including the 1980s refugee crisis in Pakistan, where Afghan mine casualties were treated by the Red Cross; the 1985–86 famine in the Horn of Africa, where mines affected aid delivery; and the decision of Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev in late 1986 to pull the Soviet Army out of Afghanistan. Following Gorbachev’s decision—the “catalyst” of HALO’s beginning—Willoughby met with Afghan engineers and Russian officials in Kabul to review the extent of the mine problem in Afghanistan¹ and how these mines affected the country, as well as the potential challenges of mass repatriation of up to five million refugees.



HALO began in the United Kingdom (with its headquarters in rural southwest Scotland) and later opened two offices in the United States. Since its formation, HALO has grown worldwide to include a staff of 8,000 and has cleared over 10 million landmines and other pieces of unexploded ordnance.²

HALO’s operations span Central and Southeast Asia, the Horn of Africa, southern Africa, Colombia, and the Caucasus and Balkans. HALO has a simple mission statement: “Getting mines out of the ground, now.”²

A Focus on Results

“Most [donors] are now realizing that mined villages and roads do not get cleared by consultants, conferences or studies—nor, for that matter, do they get cleared by bloated headquarters,” Willoughby says. Despite an often bureaucratic mine-action community, Willoughby says that international donors today are insisting that their funds be used¹ to speed up the demining process. He believes his hard-hitting speech, “Landmines and Sex,” at the Nairobi Review Conference helped donors concentrate their funds on clearance of the most impoverished mined communities. HALO itself concentrates on more physical gains, addressing several aspects of mine clearance around the globe, including survey and task prioritization based on the communities with the greatest landmine impact, manual mine clearance, mechanical mine clearance, explosive-ordnance disposal, battle-area clearance and mine-risk education. Finally, village-by-village “mine-free surveys” add further assurance that communities are free from the threat of mines.²

Survey and Task Prioritization

HALO believes that **only** experienced staff should conduct survey activities. Accurate initial surveying avoids unproductive or skewed results that might then require a complete re-surveying. Planning and prioritization depends on a variety of factors. HALO takes into account several things when deciding how to prioritize, including: expected

refugee movement, casualty reduction and prevention, agricultural planting and grazing seasons, vital access to water supplies or markets, national or local government infrastructure priorities, and ground or weather constraints.²

Manual and Mechanical Mine Clearance

Manual mine clearance is the backbone of HALO's operations. The HALO strategy involves a high number of deminers employed concurrently in a specific area. Of the hundreds of individuals deployed to these areas, each individual will typically cover 15–25 square meters (about four to six square miles) per day. Manual deminers are equipped with electronic detectors that provide warnings of even the smallest metal content, which helps in identifying minimum metal mines. These detectors have become more effective in recent years, and the dual-sensor detectors HALO uses gives deminers a greater ability to differentiate between metal clutter and actual landmines.

HALO also deploys over 200 mechanical mine-clearance systems to assist deminers who are faced with the challenge of difficult terrain, thick vegetation and/or deeply buried mines. In past years HALO has used flails but now believes they suffer from too much "down-time" and do not produce the level and quality of clearance that other more simplistic systems can achieve.

Mine-risk Education

HALO staff members make appearances in community centers and schools to raise community awareness of mine and ERW threats. The success of MRE programs, however, can create a rather ironic problem in donor funding. If, as a result of these MRE sessions, human casualties are not occurring, many donors and agencies are reluctant to support clearance. Subsequently, "in these situations a successful MRE program can delay land being cleared of mines for many years, resulting in continued livestock casualties, and mines denying access to ground for cultivation and subsistence living."²

UXO Disposal

UXO disposal has become one of HALO's top humanitarian priorities in recent years. Many poor civilians try to collect UXO, looking to sell the scrap metal. With the global rise in the price of metal, this situation has worsened.² Through their clearance and disposal efforts, HALO has recognized the need for action in order to decrease the number of lethal accidents occurring.

Where HALO Operates

Currently, there are five regions/countries that HALO anticipates becoming mine-free in the near future, but this achievement can only happen within the next 10 years with continued support from donors such as the Bureau of Political Military Affairs' Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, and the governments of Japan, the Netherlands and Switzerland, among many others, according to Willoughby.

- **Abkhazia/Georgia** is close to being impact-free, except for the Upper Kodori Valley. Following the August 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia, internally displaced persons were resettling in the Upper Kodori villages and the need for urgent humanitarian mine clearance arose. Abkhazia could be cleared by the end of 2010 or 2011, although clearance operations in the Caucasus Mountain valleys are very weather-dependent during early summer and late autumn. Data collection, planning and operational coordination is provided by the Abkhaz Mine Action Centre, which HALO established in 1999.
- **Kosovo** is in need of increased clearance capacity if it is to be mine- and cluster-munition-free in the next four years. Currently, the Kosovo Security Force is being restructured, so HALO provides a great deal of the mine clearance in the country.
- **Nagorno-Karabakh** could be completely demined by HALO in the next four to five years with the aid of six manual and mechanical demining teams.
- **Northern Mozambique** was declared mine-free and is considered compliant with the Ottawa Convention. HALO is now in Southern/Central Mozambique, which is expected to require five years to demine and is expected to meet its Ottawa deadline of 2014, if funding can be augmented to clear minefields along the Zimbabwe border.
- **Somaliland** has had its Landmine Impact Survey reviewed in a HALO Baseline Survey; HALO thinks it could complete clearance in the next four years.

Additionally, HALO operates in several countries with contamination that will take 10 or more years to clear. Willoughby says these countries, which will struggle to meet Ottawa Convention deadlines, are on HALO's long-term clearance list.

- **Afghanistan** faces extensive contamination—surveyed minefields take clearance requirements to 2020, despite HALO fielding nearly 4,000 staff in Afghanistan and the many other mine-action organizations operating in the country.
- **Angola** could take until 2018 for complete eradication of currently-surveyed minefields; however, before then, HALO will have made at least three affected provinces mine-free and helped tens of thousands of families to resettle.
- **Cambodia** could undergo clearance efforts for another seven to 14 years. Country-wide resurveying is considered a priority, and a Baseline Survey is underway to define contaminated areas more specifically. Donor interest in Cambodia is lagging, however, at a time when the light may be visible at the end of the tunnel.
- **Sri Lanka** will finish clearance of minefields in Jaffna, which are not located in the current High Security Zone. The military defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has opened up the need for urgent and extensive mine clearance in the Vanni, however, and HALO has already deployed hundreds of deminers to clear ground being identified for IDP resettlement.
- **Colombia** is HALO's newest program. HALO was the first nongovernmental agency to be invited by the government in Bogotá to provide clearance. With over two million IDPs and the highest number of landmine casualties in the world, Colombia is a long-term commitment for HALO.

The Future of HALO

Funding for the “less fashionable countries” is currently the greatest challenge for The HALO Trust. Guy Willoughby hopes to see an increase in the number of donor representatives that visit rural communities affected by landmines so they can “see for themselves the benefit of mine clearance.”¹ But the 10-year convention anniversary of the Mine Ban entering into force does give donors a chance to review their funding and see how, given sustained funding, the problem of mines affecting the poorest communities can and is being entirely solved by properly-managed humanitarian demining. Yet, Willoughby feels there is room for improvement. He hopes the United Nations will take a more formal stand against certain programs, such as the Landmine Impact Survey. Willoughby says the LIS is now widely accepted as producing a flawed and exaggerated landmine problem, requiring resurveying at great expense to the donors, in new Baseline Surveys. Willoughby also believes that the United Nations should clarify how it believes mine-detecting dogs should be used.

Overall, Willoughby foresees a promising future for The HALO Trust: “The timelines for completing mine clearance are coming together, and we are clearing more mines and more land year on year. When broken down to village level, everyday HALO is handing over cleared ground to families.” This makes “humanitarian demining **the** precursor for development, whether as rural self-help or ... as part of a formal follow-on mainstream development program.”¹ ➔

Biographies



Jessica Jacklin was an Editorial Assistant with *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* from August 2008 to May 2009. She graduated from James Madison University in 2009 with a Bachelor of Business Administration with a concentration in European business and a minor in studio art.

Endnotes

1. E-mail interview with Guy Willoughby, President of The HALO Trust. 22 Sept. 2008.
2. *The HALO Trust*. <http://www.halotrust.org>. Accessed 31 October 2008.
3. “Cindy McCain The Halo Trust Compound Kosova March 2008,” *McCain Campaign*. *iVillage Videos*. <http://video.ivillage.com/player/?id=715665#videoid=715664>>. Accessed 30 October 2008.

Contact Information

Jessica Jacklin
 Editorial Assistant
The Journal of ERW and Mine Action

Mine Action Information Center
Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
James Madison University
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

Guy Willoughby
President and Director
The HALO Trust
Carronfoot Thornhill
Dumfries DG3 5HN / UK
Tel: +44 1848-331100
E-mail: mail@halotrust.org
Web site: www.halotrust.org



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