Latin Victims are Invisible to the International Media

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Latin Victims are Invisible to the International Media

Colombia continues to be the country with the highest number of new anti-personnel landmine victims in the world, with 10 other countries on the American continents having problems with mines as well. This situation, however, seems not to exist for the international news media. Even specialized publications seldom show a picture or publish an article about Central or South America; consequently, most people still believe that the landmine problem is confined exclusively to Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

In November 2008, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines issued the Landmine Monitor Report 2008: Toward a Mine-Free World, which shows Colombia (from 2005 until the present) as the No. 1 country in the world for new anti-personnel landmine victims. Allow us to repeat this important fact: Presently, no other country in the world has more accidents from landmines than Colombia. Repetition of this statement is necessary because the international media and public continue to ignore Colombia’s situation.

As journalists, photographers, researchers and documentarians, we have participated in countless conferences, seminars, exhibitions, forums, interviews and film festivals across Latin America since 2004, denouncing the situation and informing others that, in addition to Colombia, 10 other Latin American countries also deal with mines in their territories. Of the thousands of people who participated with us in these events, the ones who were not astonished by this information were rare, and most of them were from Colombia. Even in Peru, Venezuela and Mexico, only the representatives of organizations directly connected to mine action were aware of the issue.

In Brazil, we obtained support from TV Brasil Canal Integrativo, which produces a daily newscast about South America, for the finalization of our documentary, Mined America. None of the people we worked with were aware that their neighbors walk on minefields. In the foreword of our book by the same name, the renowned photographer Tim Page, a mine victim himself, attests that Mined America “is the first... light on the issue from Latin America. Page, who has participated in mine-action activities with Mines Advisory Group throughout Southeast Asia and the Balkans for over 10 years, had no knowledge about the seriousness of Colombia’s plight. How could the media have ignored such an alarming fact for so long? In addition, what are the consequences of this lack of knowledge for the population of the affected areas?

The Big Media

Traditionally, the media, in part through the actions of celebrities and the entertainment industry, have highlighted the issue of mines in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Princess Diana never visited the mine victims in Nicaragua, Angelina Jolie has not searched for orphans to adopt among the mine victims in Colombia, and the international media and public continue to ignore Colombia’s situation. Consequently, even when movies show the subject are scarce. Paradoxically, the Brazilian publication show the first pictures of Colombia, the photograph of a quiquebrapatas (“paw-breaker”) on page 20 and another of a victim of the Bolevar departments (state) on page 23. The 2000 report listed, for the first time in the Executive Summary, the official number of victims in Colombia in 1999–2000 as a total of 98,5 which was substantially less than the more than 1,100 victims in Colombia but double the approximate 50 victims in Nicaragua estimated then by the Nicaraguan Red Cross.6 The 2001 Landmine Monitor Report6 shows one of the most beautiful images of the whole series on its cover: the sepia picture of a crouching child occupying the space between a crusty and the healthy leg of an adult, with another victim sitting in a wheelchair in the background. The child’s regarding the presence of pictures of Latin American and especially Colombian victims, both in specialized publications and in newspapers and magazines with general content. In Brazil, for instance, with the publication of a few of our articles in vennas such as Folha de S.Paulo and Rolling Stone, a magazine focused on pop music and culture) in recent years only the O Globo newspaper has published a substantial front-page article about the subject. The article featured eight pictures of victims and was placed in its Sunday magazine on 11 November 2007. This publication, however, had no influence whatsoever on any newscast of TV Globo, the largest and most important television network in the country. Even in the Colombian press, the publications with detailed reports on the subject are scarce. Paradoxically, the Brazilian edition of Rolling Stone published an article. In the same vein, a series of articles showing very touching pictures of Colombian mine victims was published in Issue 98 of the men’s magazine Jovem.

Specialized Media

With regard to specialized publications, things are not that different. Over the years, the Executive Summary of the Landmine Monitor Report, published by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines since 1999, always includes pictures of mine victims on the cover; however, on only two occasions the pictured individuals were Latin American. Not surprisingly, in its first issue,2 the cover showed pictures of a Cambodian child who had been photographed four years earlier in 1995. Inside, the pictures emphasized African and Asian victims, despite the publication already reporting that Colombia was the only country in the Americas where landmines were still being emplaced, and that Colombia and Nicaragua had the biggest contamination problems on the continent. Only in the following year (2000)3 would the publication show the first pictures of Colombia, the photograph of a quiquebrapatas (“paw-breaker”) on page 20 and another of a victim of the Bolevar departments (state) on page 23. The 2001 report listed, for the first time in the Executive Summary, the official number of victims in Colombia in 1999–2000 as a total of 98, which was substantially less than the more than 1,100 victims in Colombia but double the approximate 50 victims in Nicaragua estimated then by the Nicaraguan Red Cross.6 The 2001 Landmine Monitor Report6 shows one of the most beautiful images of the whole series on its cover: the sepia picture of a crouching child occupying the space between a crusty and the healthy leg of an adult, with another victim sitting in a wheelchair in the background. The child’s regarding the presence of pictures of Latin American and especially Colombian victims, both in specialized publications and in newspapers and magazines with general content. In Brazil, for instance, with the publication of a few of our articles in vennas such as Folha de S.Paulo and Rolling Stone, a magazine focused on pop music and culture) in recent years only the O Globo newspaper has published a substantial front-page article about the subject. The article featured eight pictures of victims and was placed in its Sunday magazine on 11 November 2007. This publication, however, had no influence whatsoever on any newscast of TV Globo, the largest and most important television network in the country. Even in the Colombian press, the publications with detailed reports on the subject are scarce. Paradoxically, the Brazilian edition of Rolling Stone published an article. In the same vein, a series of articles showing very touching pictures of Colombian mine victims was published in Issue 98 of the men’s magazine Jovem.

It is not only in Colombia that mines wound and kill innocent civilians in Latin America. Freddy Mercado was injured by a mine that he thought was a rock while fetching his days close to a power tower in the Peruvian mountains.

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of the LMR Executive
only on pages 55 and 56
A Latin American survivor of an AP land-
mine would only appear on a cover of The
Journal in Issue 8.2 (November 2004), an
internal pages of the Executive Summary show
only three pictures
The central plaza of the country’s capital.
As we can see, even in an edition focused
to August in that year, 510
persons wounded or killed by mines and ERW
were officially registered.39 From
January to August in the same year, only
one mine-related incident in Nicaragua occurred.40 In
edition issue 11.1 (August 2007), only eight images of
persons wounded by mines in Latin America appeared in
The Journal, including three pictures
we provided (that were taken in Colombia) along
with another taken in Peru.
Conclusion
While in most regions of the world,
including Central America, the problem of
AP mines has decreased or stabilized due
to the stigmatization of these weapons
by the Ottawa Convention, landmines are still
a very real threat for millions of people in
South America, especially in Colombia. If
the general and specialized media, however,
persist in providing little visibility on the
subject, victims will continue being ignored by the public, and it will become
increasingly difficult to obtain the funds
necessary to assist them, as well as for other
mine-action activities. While international
public attention currently turns to the issue
of cluster bombs and other munitions, the
Latin-American victims of old-fashioned
anti-personnel mines are in great danger
of disappearing from the eyes of the world.
See Endnotes, Page 111
Due to the internal conflict with no end in sight, Colombian Army recruits, like
Jairo Lopez, still are the biggest number of registered victims.

The next edition, Issue 9.1 (August 2005), showed
possibly the best of all the cover images of mine survivors within the entire Journal
collection.41 The photo, taken by the Armenian photographer
German Arvyansk, gently portrays little Armine Yeghiazaryan.
Paradoxically, the only Latin-American victims shown in
the summer edition of 2005 were Nicaraguan, even though
2005 is the same year in which Colombia reached the top
of the list of countries with the highest number of accidents
with mines.42 From January to August in that year, 510
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