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Unsung Hero: Vanja Jokic Raznjevic

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A single mother, Vanja Ražnjević felt that she had no other choice than to apply for a demining position with Norwegian People’s Aid. “I needed a job,” says Ražnjević, “and this job seemed really normal for me because I spent time in Croatia during the war and became accustomed to danger.”

During the war, Ražnjević lived in Benkovac, a small town close to Zadar. The town was a part of former Krajina, a region in Croatia where Serbs live; therefore, Benkovac was on the frontline of the war. As a civilian, she encountered danger every day. “Bombs and grenades were all around,” says Ražnjević.

Landmines are still a present problem in Croatia, and Ražnjević’s children are learning about it as a result of their mother’s job. “I always talk with them about the landmine situation and about my job. They understand what I am doing and they know the dangers of demining.”

It has been six years since Ražnjević attended the Croatian Ministry of Interior’s national demining training course in Zagreb. She was the only woman in the group of trainees. She graduated from the course as one of the best participants and started working in the field alongside veteran male deminers.

“In the beginning I was inexperienced,” says Ražnjević, “but my more experienced colleagues taught me the demining procedures that I was not familiar with. I can say that I have not received any criticism for my work as a deminer. It is not possible to make a mistake in this job.”

Ražnjević’s calm confidence and her ability to coordinate her personal and professional life have won admiration from her colleagues. Silvija Bogdany, Ražnjević’s former trainee leader, says of Ražnjević, “She is under much more pressure. I think that her children are always on her mind. For me, things are rather simple. I don’t have as much responsibility. I think that it is important for deminers to be adequately educated and I think that it is important to develop deminers’ rights.”

Her vision for the future of demining is optimistic. “I believe that we will find a more effective way to remove the problem. I hope that I will still be working in this field when we do,” says Ražnjević. “In the future I wish to work as a leader of demining projects all over the world.”

Reflecting on her career as a deminer, Ražnjević says her experiences with demining have been good: “I can say that I have found myself in this job. I am clearing landmines with pleasure. I feel happy when I can destroy something that can destroy somebody’s life. I am ready to continue demining in the future, but I will never do the opposite—I mean I don’t want to lay mines.”

Jennette Townsend and Rachel Canfield | Mine Action Information Center

Angolan Landmine Commission Establishes Monitoring Team

The Coordinator of the Provincial Commission on Landmine Action and Humanitarian Aid (CNDAA) in Huambo, Angola, announced the formation of a team to monitor demining methods by the end of 2007.

Agostinho Nyaka said the team will work in heavily mined provinces like Bailundo, Huambo, Katchiungo and Tchicala-Tcholohanga. The team will evaluate demining policies and strategies with the goal of alleviating long delays in the monitoring of the quality of cleared areas.

The team members will be incorporated into the demining process as soon as possible and will facilitate clearance operations for the opening of new roads and farmland.