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[Contents](#) | [Editorials](#) | [Focus](#) | [Feature](#) | [Making it Personal](#) | [Heroes](#)
[Notes from the Field](#) | [Profiles](#) | [Research and Development](#) | [JMA](#) |

Angola

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By: Sarah Sensamaust [Mine Action Information Center]

After a quarter-century of fighting, Angola is slowly becoming a restored, self-sufficient country. The civil war among the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, the *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* and the *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* broke out almost immediately following independence from Portugal in 1975 after 400 years of colonization. In 1991, these groups agreed to turn Angola into a multi-party state and President Jose Eduardo dos Santos of MPLA won U.N.-supervised elections. UNITA, however, claimed the elections were fraudulent and war ensued again. Although a ceasefire was declared in 2002, President dos Santos has not allowed a democratic process but pledges to hold legislative elections in 2006.¹

The Mine Problem

It is estimated that Angola's war resulted in the death of 1.5 million people and over four million displaced persons.² In addition to rebuilding national infrastructure, resettling refugees and reclaiming weapons from a heavily armed civilian population, Angola is coping with the landmines left littered across the country. No one knows the exact extent of the contamination since many of the mines were placed at random, and few placement records exist. Estimates range from 500,000 to one million mines.² The Landmine Impact Survey identified 1,402 mine- and unexploded ordnance-impacted communities with a population of more than 1.6 million people in 10 of Angola's 18 provinces.² After suspension of the LIS in May 2005 because of a lack of funds, the Survey process has recently restarted at a reduced level.

Adriano Francisco Gonçalves, national coordinator for victim assistance at the



(click on thumbnail to see larger image in new window)

Comissão Nacional Intersectorial de Desminagem e Assistência Humanitária, says there are approximately 70,000 to 80,000 mine survivors in Angola.³ The presence of so many mine victims creates serious economic and social challenges because "the victims tend to be young men who are farmers. These men were typically the bread-winners and, as a result of their accidents, are dependent on their families."³

Clearance

In 2004, Angola reported clearance of 10.7 square kilometers (4.1 square miles) and the removal of 7,351 anti-personnel mines.² Organizations involved in this clearance include DanChurchAid, HALO Trust, INTERSOS, Mines Advisory Group, Norwegian People's Aid, *Menschen gegen Minen* and *Stiftung Sankt Barbara*. In addition, five mine-action operators reported clearance of over 9.5 square kilometers (3.7 square miles). Thanks to funding estimated at US\$28 million, Angola has improved clearance in comparison to previous years.

"The demining situation is going well, but a lot of improvements could be made," Gonçalves believes; "in order to know when we will reach our goal, we need more donor support so that we can buy the necessary equipment,"³ he says. As a member of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention,⁴ Angola must destroy all AP mines in mined areas before January 2013. Angolan officials say they will be unable to meet their January 2007 deadline for complete destruction of their AP mine stockpile.

Mine-risk Education

Domingas Cristovao, deputy director of the *Comissão Nacional Intersectorial de Desminagem e Assistência Humanitária* says mine-risk education is crucial to Angolan mine action: "Educating the public in Angola includes using all media available: newspaper, television, radio, speaking with traditional leaders and just getting the word out in communities."⁵

CNIDAH leads Angola's MRE activities. Most recently, CNIDAH created an MRE campaign themed "Stay on the Safe Path."⁶ Due to an increasing number of vehicle accidents related to mines, the goal is to educate all passengers and drivers of any form of transportation. Mine-risk educators facilitated mine-safety conversations with motorists at the most popular stopping places. As a result of "Stay on the Safe Path," an estimated 16,000 drivers and 97,000 passengers were educated about the existence of mines. This campaign is credited with the impressive decline of landmine incidents in this area from 52 in the previous season to two after the MRE blitz.

Angola's Mine-safe Future

As the second-largest producer of oil in sub-Saharan Africa, Angola is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Petroleum, diamonds, fertile agricultural land and fishing resources could bring the nation a wealth of economic success. Mine clearance in Angola has been underway for over a decade and, depending on donor support, the country could be mine-safe in the next eight years.⁷ As clearance efforts continue, internally displaced people and Angolan refugees will be able to safely return to their homeland. The Angolan government and its people continue to strive toward reconciliation and mine clearance in order to have a safer and more prosperous future.

Biography

Sarah graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in international relations and a

concentration in African studies. She currently lives in Keezletown, Va., but will soon be moving with her husband to Cairo, Egypt, to pursue her master's degree in professional development.



Endnotes

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4. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*, Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997; <http://www.icbl.org/treaty/text>. Accessed May 3, 2006.
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