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by Ellie Loveman,
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Since it gained independence from Portugal in 1975, Angola has faced many landmine challenges as a result of civil wars. Mines that were laid during conflicts now litter the environment, blocking roads and bridges and contaminating agricultural fields. These mines prove a constant threat to the people of the country as well as to those who are working to prevent future accidents through mine removal. Fernando Arroyo of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Huambo, Angola, said, "Everyone ... appears to have buried landmines here. You'll find Portuguese mines from the 1960s, Cuban mines from the 1970s, South African mines from the 1980s and Chinese mines scattered in between. Nobody kept records."¹ Angola faced more war in 1992 when a peace agreement with National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) unraveled.

A Haunting Past: The Origin of Angola's Landmine Crisis

An internal conflict between the Angolan government and UNITA wreaked havoc on the citizens of Angola from 1975 to 2002. AT and AP mines were planted by both sides during the war, an estimated total of 10–20 million—enough for one or two mines per person.

During the Angolan civil war, the Angolan government, UNITA, Cubans and South Africans deployed mines. In 2000, landmines claimed 840 victims in Angola, with half the accidents occurring on roads contaminated with mines. As of 2001, one in every 334 Angolans was an amputee and less than 30 percent of the population had access to health care. As a result, still today up to half of those injured die before or after surgery. In 2004 alone, a mine incident occurred every four days.

On December 4, 1997, Angola signed the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention, but landmines were still used against UNITA until a peace agreement was formed between the two parties in April 2002. Angola ratified the Mine Ban Convention on July 5, 2002, and the Convention became effective on January 1, 2003.

Working for a Mine-Safe Angola

The war-torn country of Angola is severely impacted by landmines; Steve Priestley, Director of International Projects for Mines Advisory Group (MAG) said, "No matter the total number of mines, of all the countries in the world, Angola is the one most heavily impacted by landmines." He added, "Whatever you want to do, whether it's plant a field or rehabilitate a school or open a road, you've first got to clear away the mines. The threat of mines has paralyzed the country."² In order to create safer living conditions for Angolans, several non-governmental organizations funded by the U.S. and several other donors

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have worked or are working to destroy and remove landmines while providing mine risk education (MRE) to help prevent future incidents.

MAG. MAG has had a presence in Angola since 1992, when it conducted a mine awareness campaign in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). In 2003, MAG assessed the mine situation and by the end of the year, a 33-person demining team was established in Moxico province, one of the most mine-affected areas in Angola. Between 1994 and 1995, MAG focused on making the land safe for agricultural purposes and creating safe paths for water and firewood collection. In 1996, a multi-skilled team with demining, UXO disposal, survey/demarcation, and mine awareness and community liaison capabilities was formed. Two more programs were established between 1996 and 1997, one in Lumege and one in Luau. Mine awareness programs were also formed in Zambia and Zaire to aid Angolan refugees living in those countries. In July 1998, MAG had to suspend demining operations due to the threats posed by UNITA in Luena. MAG returned to Luena in September 2000 and continues to operate its mine action program.

Menschen gegen Minen (MgM). Founded by Hendrik Ehlers and Hans Georg Kruessen on January 16, 1996, in Germany, MgM (in English, People Against Landmines) is one of the most active mine action groups in Angola today. With operations in Cunene, Huíla, Kwanza Sul and Bengo, MgM utilizes a variety of demining methods. For example, deminers, surveyors and an assortment of vehicles are employed to combat mines found in all areas of the country. Some of the vehicles in use are armored graders, rotary sifting units and Samil 20 Rhinos.

According to Ken O'Connell, program director of MgM Angola, the organization had its first major accomplishment in 1998, when it opened the Nambuanguo district of the northeast Bengo province. Between December 1996 and February 1998, 250 kilometers (155.34 miles) of road were opened, allowing an estimated 54,000 out of the 60,000 residents of the Boa Esperanca internally displaced person (IDP) camp to return home. In addition, in the past two years, work done by MgM allowed 35,000 people to return home to the central area of Huíla province. Finally, O'Connell said that all the bridges MgM constructed before the civil war started again in 1998 were still standing in 2002. As of April 2005, approximately 100,000 IDPs and refugees have been returned to their homes due to the efforts of MgM.



Between 1999 and 2003, MgM cleared 2,904,259 square meters (1.12 square miles) of affected land, destroyed 999 AP mines and 50 anti-vehicle mines, and verified 129 kilometers (80.15 miles) of road.

Angolan National Institute for the Removal of Explosive Devices and Obstacles (INAROE). Established in 1995 by national decree, INAROE was formed as the primary national organization for demining action in Angola. The organization receives support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the governments of Norway, Sweden and Canada. With a focus on humanitarian mine action, INAROE has offices in seven provinces in Angola and works in survey, awareness, and clearance activities. According to INAROE, approximately 1.2 million people received MRE in Angola between 1995 and November 2001.

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). One of the organizations currently working in the field of demining in Angola is Norwegian People's Aid (NPA). Founded in 1939 as a part of the Norwegian labor movement, the NPA has expanded its focus to become a leader in global human rights and the struggle to attain human dignity.³ Since 1992, the NPA has worked in Angola, concentrating on demining the main

road between the cities of Luanda and Malange, has begun mapping minefields in the country, and has initiated an extensive mine-awareness campaign.

The HALO Trust. Since 1994, HALO, a British non-governmental organization (NGO), has worked in Angola. HALO has increased its national staff presence in Angola to 620 and its number of manual demining teams to 40. In 2004, HALO had operational bases in Bié, Huambo, Benguela and Cuando Cubango. HALO also places emphasis on work in the Planalto region in Angola. HALO is currently working towards completion of surveying and marking all minefields in the Planalto.

survivors are living in Angola. According to the Angola Educational Assistance Fund, Inc., in 1997, 40 percent of mine victims were children, 8,000 of the 70,000 amputees in the population were children and 150 to 200 new accidents occurred each week.

Today, according to statistics provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 10–15 percent of all mine victims worldwide are women. In Angola, the national percentage is 20 percent. More women are working outside the home in traditional male roles due to the deaths and injuries of the men who fought in the war, which increases their chances of encountering landmines. Women are affected in worse

ways than men, however, as an injured woman is considered a burden and does not receive necessary support from the male-dominated community.

MRE in Angola

Since Angola has thousands of mine victims, IDPs and refugees each year, the need for quality MRE is great. Proper instruction, knowledge about identifying landmines and information on what to do if one is found are essential to preventing landmine casualties. According to the 2004 *Landmine Monitor Report*, up to 20 different agencies have conducted MRE in Angola since 1999. In 2003, 806,319 individuals received MRE through 8,077 events sponsored by international NGOs. Handi-

cap International (HI), the ICRC, MAG and UNICEF are four organizations that perform MRE in Angola.

HI. HI has been conducting MRE in Angola since 1995 through radio, theater, comics and the involvement of local authority figures. HI has worked with ex-UNITA soldiers and their families in camps for the displaced in order to provide them with proper MRE and support.

The ICRC. The ICRC's MRE involvement started in 2002, and in 2003 it helped train a network of 40 volunteers in Benguela and Bié provinces to conduct 300 MRE sessions. These sessions benefited approximately 48,000 people. The volunteers distributed information about contaminated areas to demining organizations in order to encourage mine clearance and marking of minefields.

MAG. According to the 2004 *Landmine Monitor Report*, MAG conducted MRE in

Moxico since 1992 and Cunene since 1999, in addition to teaching refugees in Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MAG has conducted MRE for approximately 87,750 people between January 2003 and June 2004. MAG has also targeted IDPs. Media used by MAG include theatre, discussion groups, posters, pamphlets and games. MAG has also collaborated with UNICEF and HI to promote mine safety with over 10,000 comic books and 5,000 posters provided to Angolan NGOs implementing MRE activities.

UNICEF. In late 1994, UNICEF began MRE activities in Angola and continues to do so. UNICEF has targeted local teachers and its goal is to teach the 29,000 primary school teachers who work with the Ministry of Education in Angola about MRE. In addition, local mine committees will be formed, comprised of local authority figures such as teachers, midwives, religious leaders and the police. These committees will have responsibility for teaching MRE to the community and maintaining minefield marking.

In addition to the MRE conducted by the aforementioned groups, plans are in the works for a new campaign to take effect in Angola. According to a November 2004 article from *United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) News*, the campaign is called "We Stay on the Right Path" and is targeted at drivers and their passengers. The goal is to encourage drivers to remain on cleared roads while traveling instead of taking shortcuts, which might have mines. A group of 540 "mobilizers"—trainers, national police, the army, motorist groups, boy scouts and NGOs—will teach drivers about the dangers of driving unmarked roads. These trainers will also encourage passengers to speak up if the driver takes the vehicle on an unsafe road. As stated by UNICEF, "in all, 30,000 drivers will be reached in the intensive first five days of the campaign, which will then run for six months using TV, radio and a network of organizations to ensure that Angola's rainy season is flooded with messages to deter drivers from taking risks."

Looking to the Future

As Angola continues to face the effects of its war-intensive history, organizations like MgM and MAG will remain involved to ease the transition to a mine-safe country. MgM continues to add new technology to its cache of mine action vehicles, which will enable the organization to remove and destroy more mines. While Angolan demining personnel cannot officially comment on how long it will take to free Angola from the effects of mines, they hope the steps they have taken thus far will one day lead to that goal. ♦

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According to the 2004 *Landmine Monitor Report*, between 1999 and 2003, HALO cleared 43,963,129 square meters (16.97 square miles) of land manually, reduced another 6,561,429 square meters (2.53 square miles), cleared 88,878,224 square meters (34.32 square miles) by battle area clearance and surveyed 35,777,569 square meters (13.81 square miles). HALO also destroyed 102,743 AP mines, 854 AV mines and 5,757 pieces of UXO.

The Cost of Landmines: Casualties

In Angola, the purpose of landmines is well-known: They are planted to cause death or injury to a person or vehicle, and casualties are expected. The Angolan government reports that, as of September 2004, an estimated 700 deaths and 2,300 injuries had resulted from landmines over the previous six years. An additional 80,000 mine