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Dear Mr. President...: Landmines All Over the World are Tearing Lives Apart

by Saiann Films

"The mine is a stealthy killer. Long after conflict is ended, its innocent victims die or are wounded singly, in countries of which we hear little. Their lonely fate is never reported."

-Diana, Princess of Wales, 1997

Dear Mr. President... is Saiann Films' second feature film and is due to be completed sometime in 2005. *Dear Mr. President...* focuses on the issues of landmines, which were used extensively by both sides during the conflicts on the island of Sri Lanka. Many people consider Sri Lanka to be a paradise on earth, but are unaware of the huge problem of minefields and other unexploded bombs strewn around conflict areas. This film is a follow-up to the first feature film, *In the Name of Buddha*, about life in troubled Sri Lanka. This film won several awards for its hard-hitting treatment of the conflict.

The story takes place in present-day Sri Lanka. It revolves around the lives of poor rural people who, having been forced to flee from the fighting, return to their village only to find that it has been turned into one giant minefield. We follow the plight of Raja, a poor farmer who struggles to survive in the village. The story shows the problems of daily living in such a dangerous area. It also shows the trauma caused to victims and their families.

Following a landmine accident that maims his daughter, Raja vents his anger by kidnapping a western non-governmental organisation (NGO) worker. This act sets into motion some devastating consequences.

In the story, the villagers struggle to build a pagoda. They believe that building the pagoda will encourage trade with neighbouring villages and will bring prosperity to their village. However, the hidden landmines claim victim after victim and the villagers are faced with an impossible task. Meanwhile, the villagers also come to hear about the American 9/11 World Trade Centre attack and are horrified.

The villagers feel that they should write a letter of sympathy to the American people. In this letter they also request the president of the United States to set an example for the rest of the world by signing the Ottawa Convention. The village community really believes that their letter will make a difference.

The filmmakers hope that this film will raise awareness among cinema-going audiences. The film also hopes to show how mine clearance experts go about their job and bring hope to communities devastated by landmines. The film is to be made on location in India, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom. So far, the film is in the early stages and has suffered slight setbacks with funding. Still, the filmmakers are hopeful in light of so many

endorsements and such enthusiasm for the project, new financial backers will come forward.

The following organisations have endorsed the film:

- The Diana, Princess of Wales, Memorial Fund
- The International Campaign to Ban Landmines
- Australian Network
- Norwegian People's Aid
- German Initiative to Ban Landmines
- Swiss Foundation for Mine Action

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