

# Landmines: The Scourge of Angola

## Angola Educational Assistance Fund

By Ian Feinhandler and Filippo Nardin for the "*New England Town Meeting to Ban Land Mines*", Boston, November 2, 1997

Angola has one of the highest rates of landmine injuries per capita in the world. Estimates for the number of landmines in Angola range from 6 to 20 million. The higher figure represents a number of mines that is nearly twice the population. According to the United Nations and the United States Department of State, Angola is the third most heavily mined country in the world.

The mining of Angola began in the 1960's during the rebellion against Portuguese sovereignty. On November 11, 1975 Angola won independence, but found itself subject to the legacy of a fourteen year war: the countryside was littered with landmines and unexploded ordnance. The situation only worsened as the three guerilla groups that forged an independent state, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and the Angola National Liberation Front (FNLA), became locked in a bitter struggle for post-colonial power. Millions of landmines were placed in the twenty-year conflict following independence, and despite the peace accord signed in 1994, the mines remain a source of terror and destruction. Today landmines are spread throughout the country in farmland, under roads, and in confining belts that surround towns and cities. A survey conducted by the Mine Advisory Group (MAG) found that in certain provinces of Angola up to 98% of landmine victims are civilian. The same survey found that these people were engaged in "survival" activities, such as gathering food or firewood, when they fell victim to a landmine; many were children who had run into a field to play.

Landmines are designed to maim, not to kill; victims often require extensive medical care including amputations and subsequent prosthetics. This type of care places a huge economic and social burden on nations such as Angola, which are heavily infested with landmines. According to Physicians Against Land Mines (PALM), one of every 334 Angolans has lost an arm or a leg to landmine injury. In addition to the cost imposed on society of caring for these injuries, landmines also inhibit economic recovery. The fields that once fed Angola and even produced a surplus, are now untilled; the danger in the countryside is so great that the cities are swamped with refugees. According to UNICEF, 85% of these Internally Displaced People (IDP) cite landmines as a reason that they cannot return to their homes and farms.

In Angola, landmines terrorize the population, cause death and terrible injuries, and prevent economic and social progress; until landmines are cleared the prospects for recovery from years of warfare are bleak. The first step, however, is to prevent more landmines from being laid. Until a global ban on landmines is enacted the people of Angola and of 63 other nations will remain hostage in their own country.

## Landmines: Most Affected Countries

| <u>Country</u>     | <u>Estimated Number of Mines</u> |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Egypt              | 23 million                       |
| Iran               | 16 million                       |
| Angola             | 9-15 million                     |
| Iraq               | 10 million                       |
| Afghanistan        | 10 million                       |
| Cambodia           | 8-10 million                     |
| Bosnia-Herzegovina | 2-3 million                      |
| Croatia            | 2 million                        |
| Mozambique         | 2 million                        |

Sources: *Landmine Data base*, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations and *Hidden Killers: The Global Landmine Crisis*, United States Department of State.

## Facts about Landmines in Angola

- Landmines hamper the return of more than 1 million Internally Displaced People.
- Children represent 49% of mine casualties.
- The amputee population is 70,000, of which 8,000 are children under the age of fifteen.
- There are between 150 and 200 new landmine victims every week.
- Less than 7% of landmine victims die, 37% require amputation.
- A child's prosthesis must be replaced every six months, an adult's every 3 to 5 years.
- Not even the parties who laid the mines have kept track of their locations or numbers.

Sources: *Mines Awareness Project 1997*, UNICEF ANGOLA and *Advocacy Project Proposal*, Angolan Campaign to Ban Landmines.

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