

Animal Casualties of the Underground War

By Adam M. Roberts and Kevin Stewart

It has become increasingly evident that animal activists need to join the fight to ban forever the use of violent, indiscriminate land mines that destroy the lives of both humans and nonhumans with their devastating force.

"My handicaps are quite visible. They can remind us of the invisible handicaps we all have...the 'landmines of the heart.' These land mines inside can lead us to war, to jealousy, to cruel power over others. If we ban the landmines of the heart along with the landmines in the earth, the needs of the poor will take priority over the wants of the rich, the freedom of the dominated over the liberty of the powerful. Together we can stop a coward's war that makes victims of us all." –Tun Channareth, Cambodian double amputee, during his acceptance speech for the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

In some instances, land mines directly threaten both people and animals. Reuters reporter Roger Atwood wrote in 1997 that roughly 20,000 land mines are strewn across the Falkland/Malvinas Islands, a remnant of Argentinean attempts to keep British by the mines since the war...but animals are regularly blown to pieces." The minefields are identified by fences and warning signs, but with "75,000 sheep, keeping the livestock from danger can be a struggle." Meanwhile, "birdwatchers, one of the biggest groups of tourists, are especially vulnerable as they walk in search of penguins, ducks and songbirds."

In Sri Lanka, as many as 20 Asian elephants are killed by mines every year, according to zoologist Charles Santiapillai of the University of Peradeniya. Thousands of miles away, in Africa, land mines have ravaged wildlife, including threatened and highly endangered species. Mines reportedly have killed more than 100 elephants in Mozambique. Scott Nathanson, a Disarmament Campaign organizer, writes that elephants in the Gorongosa national game park "have been maimed because of anti-personnel land mines, or killed because of anti-tank mines."

In Zimbabwe, Lt. Col. Martin Rupiah, a lecturer at the Center for Defense Studies at the University of Zimbabwe, claims that "every village near Chiredzi has lost at least one animal to land mines...In the Gonarezhou National Park, elephants and buffaloes have had to be killed after they were injured by land mines." In northwest Rwanda, one of the region's highly endangered mountain gorillas was killed by a land mine as a result of that country's recent civil war. According to the field staff of the International Gorilla Conservation Program, the 20-year-old male silverback was named Mkono, which means "hand" in the Kiswahili language; he had already lost a hand to a poacher's snare.

In Croatia, Professor Djuro Huber of the University of Zagreb has documented wildlife fatalities due to land mines. His reports note the deaths of European brown bears, roe, deer, lynxes, and foxes as a result of mines placed in the region from 1990 to 1996.

The placement of land mines also poses an indirect threat to wildlife. In many regions of the world, arable farmland is rendered useless when mines are placed in fields. This causes farmers to move into marginal adjoining regions otherwise inhabited by wildlife. As poverty increases because of farmland restrictions, hunting may increase to feed hungry families. Similarly, poaching wild animals may increase to fund arms purchases. In 1995, Nick Rufford reported in the London Sunday Times that the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia used tiger skins and bones to purchase anti-tank land mines and guns.

Just as wildlife habitat and farmland are put in conflict as a result of land mine placement, livestock animals are specifically harmed by mine explosions. Since herds are usually large, an explosion set off by one animal may kill many others. A study of the social and economic costs of mines in Afghanistan,

Bosnia, Cambodia, and Mozambique concluded that more than 54,000 animals were lost to land mine detonations. Mines deployed during World War II eventually killed more than 3,000 animals per year in Libya between 1940 and 1980.

A 1996 Reuter's report by Jonathon Lyons in Iraq tells of a farmer named Sali Abdullah whose "horse stepped on a mine, sending fragments, dirt and rocks tearing through [Abdullah's] face and upper body. The animal was killed on the spot, but doctors remain hopeful they can save Abdullah's eyesight." Such livestock/land mine encounters are not strictly accidental. Lt. Col. Rupiah noted that land mines placed in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) back in the early 1960s still exist and that "[s]ince 1980, only 10 percent of the minefields have been cleared." He suggests that as much as farmers in their villages place 80 percent of these mines in communal areas that should have been available for use after they won independence. Those farmers who chose to return to their lands "pushed their cattle ahead to detonate the mines."

In western Bosnia there are unconfirmed reports that residents of Sanski Most have developed their own method of demining called "sheep-demining" where they simply let sheep loose into unsecured areas. Sheep were also used to clear mine fields during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War.

A coordinated effort is under way to use well-trained dogs for mine verification and marking. Dogs trained at the Swedish Dog Academy and used at the Cambodian Mine Action Center are used to find and identify mines, allowing human workers to fence off the surrounding area and eliminate the mine. The United States has supported the use of this new brand of "sniffer dog," which is apparently better at mine detection than mechanical detectors because many mines are now predominantly plastic and can be unearthed by the dogs.

Unfortunately, the United States has not been an enthusiastic supporter of recent global efforts to ban these dreadful devices and ensure their removal and worldwide destruction. The United States refused to join 125 other nations in signing the historic Ottawa treaty: the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. The Treaty establishes a schedule for all participating nations to stop using, developing, producing, acquiring, or stockpiling land mines and delineates a commitment to ensure the destruction of anti-personnel mines.

The United States was not alone in its refusal; other nations including China, Egypt, the former Soviet Union, Israel, and Pakistan also did not sign. Like the United States, these nations are among the world's leading producers and exporters of anti-personnel land mines. President Clinton used the excuse that land mines along the Korean demilitarized zone are an essential deterrent to an attack by North Korea. Meanwhile, approximately 26,000 people are killed or maimed every year by a fraction of the estimated 100 million mines spread throughout the world. No one knows for sure how many animals are killed, but it is clear that land mines are indiscriminate and devastating.

The 1997 treaty is an important step toward stopping the epidemic of mine casualties. However, every effort must be made to remove and destroy existing mines. A mine that costs as little as \$3 to place may cost \$300-\$1,000 to remove. Adequate funding is a vital component to the international land mine extraction effort. The United States has committed \$80 million to the effort in 1998, but the United Nations estimates that the entire effort may cost more than \$30 billion to complete.

Some members of Congress are committed to the crusade to eliminate land mines. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL) introduced legislation to bar American armed forces from using anti-personnel land mines for one-year beginning in January 1999. President Clinton signed the Land Mine Use Moratorium Act into law in early 1996. Senator Leahy also introduced a bill in June 1997 with Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) to ban deployments of anti-personnel mines after January 1, 2000. Representative Evans has since introduced a companion bill in the House.

There is now a historic opportunity to build on existing leadership in the quest for the cooperative global elimination of land mines. Animal activists need to enlist in the effort to win the coward's war for the sake of innocent beings everywhere.

YOUR AGENDA:

- ◆ To encourage greater political support for land mine elimination, write to President Clinton and urge that the United States sign the Ottawa Treaty.
- ◆ Contact your senators and representatives about supporting the Leahy (S.896)/Evans (H.R. 2459) Land Mine Elimination Act.

Several web sites offer information on land mine issues. For details about animal and environmental damage caused by land mines, visit [www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/~ puppydog/index.html](http://www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/~puppydog/index.html).

To learn about the international campaign to ban land mines, contact <http://www.vvaf.org>; for demining projects, see <http://www.mgm.org/>.

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