

Landmine Survivor's Network

Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) works to help mine victims and their families recover through an integrated program of peer counseling, sports, and social and economic re-integration into their communities. In countries in the developing world where landmines are prevalent, survivors lose more than a leg or arm; they often lose their place as a valued and respected member of their society. LSN works with survivors and their families to support their efforts to retake their place and become productive members of their communities. For example, landmine survivors play a crucial role in landmine education, particularly for children within communities at risk.

Since its inception, the LSN has been building a worldwide network to link landmine survivors with the resources available to help them. LSN is developing the first comprehensive database designed to track the rehabilitation needs of mine victims and the organizations that can channel urgently needed assistance to the impoverished survivors who need it most.

Today, the network is concentrating its efforts on the mine-polluted countries where most survivors live, including Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia, Cambodia and Mozambique. In each country, we are working to bring medical supplies, education and employment opportunities to thousands of survivors. LSN is on the steering committee of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), a coalition of more than 1,000 humanitarian, religious and development groups, that was a co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Jerry White

Jerry White, co-founder and Director of LSN, stepped on a mine in Israel in 1984 while hiking with friends. He has 10 years experience tracking the spread of weapons of mass destruction. A graduate of Brown University, White worked at the Brookings Institution prior to becoming Assistant Director of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control in Washington, D.C. He has testified before Congress and published numerous articles in the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and International Herald Tribune. White is past editor of the Risk Report, an award-winning publication and database that tracks military related technology.

White's injury in a mine field in Israel belies the arguments of those who believe the mine problem can be solved by better signs and fences. White spent five months in a hospital in Tel Aviv, where he underwent five operations and learned to walk with a prosthesis. "I was only four years old when Syrian soldiers, retreating during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, laid Soviet-supplied mines in the Golan Heights. The soldiers no doubt hoped the mines would maim or kill Israeli troops. Instead, my mine waited silently in the ground for nearly 17 years until it exploded under my foot and blew off my right leg.

"I was 20 years old. I had taken time from my university studies in the United States to explore the Middle East. I wasn't a soldier. I was armed with only a backpack and an Arabic and Hebrew dictionary. Two friends and I had decided to explore northern Israel on a hiking trip. We were looking for a place to camp and had no idea that we had entered a mine field. There was no fence and no sign to keep us out. The next morning, on a beautiful spring day, I stepped on a mine. I can still remember the deafening blast and the smell of blood, burnt flesh and metal. Only when my friends rolled me over did they see the extent of my wounds. The explosion had ripped off my right foot, shrapnel had lacerated my skin and my left leg was open and raw, with a bone sticking out of my calf. We screamed for help but it seemed that no one but God could hear. Either I would bleed to death, or my friends would have to carry me out of the mine field. Luckily we made it out without further loss.

"All the talk about fencing and marking mine fields is a distraction from the real challenge: to stop the proliferation of landmines. I was injured in a country that takes pride in how well it has fenced and marked its mine fields. But even in a small, security-conscious state like Israel, fences break down, signs fade, fall, or are stolen and mines shift with changes in weather and soil erosion."

Ken Rutherford

Ken Rutherford, co-founder of LSN, holds masters' degrees in international affairs and business administration and has extensive international experience, including work as a U.S. Peace Corps trainer in Mauritania and for the U.N. High Commissioner for refugees in Senegal. Rutherford was a training officer in Somalia for the International Rescue Committee when he was injured by a landmine in December 1993. Rutherford underwent 11 operations including the amputation of both his legs below the knee. Since his accident, he has traveled worldwide to speak out in favor of a ban and to raise awareness of the mass suffering caused by these weapons. Rutherford currently holds a teaching fellowship at Georgetown University, where he is pursuing doctoral studies in government.

"In December 1993, I was working as a training officer for the International Rescue Committee in Somalia, where my job was to help Somalis apply for loans so they could rebuild their country. My project was funded by USAID. On December 16, as I was inspecting a program site near the border with Ethiopia, my car hit a landmine. I suddenly became something rare for an American: a landmine victim. It was to change my life forever.

"After the explosion, I first remember seeing a foot lying on the floorboard of the car. I remember thinking: 'Is it mine?' It was. It was my right foot. I remember that I kept trying to put it back on, but it kept falling off. Then I looked at my left foot. The top part was ripped off and I could see bones going to my toes, one of which was missing. I dragged myself out of the car and called for help on my radio. It seemed like a lifetime before help arrived. While I was waiting, I prayed to God. I was also spitting up blood, so I thought that I might have internal injuries that could be fatal. I asked God that if I lived, I would like to marry Kim, my fiancé of two months, and raise a family. In the evacuation plane from Somalia to Nairobi, a Belgian doctor and an American nurse gave me blood from their bodies to mine.

"I am here today because of the resources I had at my disposal. I had a radio to call for help and airplanes to evacuate me. Most landmine victims are not so lucky. The United Nations estimates that the average lifetime care of a landmine victim costs from \$5,000 to \$7,000. My medical costs have already exceeded a quarter of a million dollars."

The statistics are staggering. Roughly every 20 minutes someone is killed or maimed by a landmine. That amounts to over 26,000 men, women and children each year injured through no fault of their own. The number of victims has been portrayed in terms of shocking ratios: one in every 230 Cambodians is an amputee from a landmine injury; one in every 330 Angolans. In truth, no one knows the exact numbers. Most mine victims die without anyone documenting the tragedy.

Today, there are hundreds of thousands of landmine survivors worldwide, including thousands of children, with no access to proper and affordable medical care and rehabilitation. Moreover, the number of victims is on the rise with assistance programs unable to keep up with the demand.

LSN Achievements

- ◆ Recognition by the Norwegian Nobel Committee of LSN's contribution to the ICBL, co-recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.
- ◆ A global ban treaty signed by 124 governments, including language recommended by LSN urging signatories to rehabilitate mine victims, the first time humanitarian assistance for victims to be included in an arms control treaty.
- ◆ High-profile tour of Bosnia in August by White, Rutherford and Diana, Princess of Wales, attracting global attention to the landmine issue just prior to the September 1997 treaty negotiations in Oslo, Norway.

- ◆ Establishment of working relationships with survivors in Africa, Asia, and Europe willing to promote cooperation on landmine issues, including better rehabilitation services.
- ◆ Development of an easy-to-use database to link landmine survivors with the resources available to help them.
- ◆ Over 35 public presentations and speeches, and well over 300 media interviews to build support for a ban treaty and victim assistance.

Since its inception, the Landmine Survivors Network has been building a worldwide network to link landmine survivors with the resources available to help them. LSN is developing the first comprehensive database designed to track the rehabilitation needs of mine victims and the organizations that can channel urgently needed assistance to the impoverished survivors who need it most.

Contact Information

Landmine Survivors Network
1420 K St. NW, Suite 650
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 464-0007
Fax (202) 464-0011
Email: LSN@landminesurvivors.org
Website: <http://www.landminesurvivors.org>