Targeting Landmines

How antipersonnel landmines impact the populations, conflicts and Economics in Latin-American countries

Photos, Documentary, Book, Articles and Reports

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The Project

The situation in Latin America, lack of information, importance of the issue, interest from the media, and purposes of the project

Any sensible person is able to understand the absurdness of war. The murder or mutilation of innocent people is an object of repulse to any government in the whole wide world. The protection to non-combatants is one of the most important issues in Geneva Conventions. However, in dozens of countries throughout the whole planet, civilians in general and especially children are still being killed or mutilated by evil weapons which don’t pick specific targets or occasions to hit their victims: the antipersonnel landmines. Eleven Latin-American countries still have to deal with such tragedy, even those which have solved their armed conflicts decades ago. Trouble is that, if not discovered, a landmine can remain active for a period of more than 50 years. And after the war is over, it’s usually the children who discover the hidden landmines – and always in the most tragic way.

The purpose of the Targeting Landmines Project is to generate a new material of good quality to stimulate the worldwide discussion on the theme and the support to governmental and non-governmental initiatives for Mine Awareness, Mine Clearance and Victims Assistance. We’ve been already publishing important articles in Brazilian and International Media. The first Exhibit is scheduled for the World Social Forum in Venezuela, January 2006. An upcoming book will be launched later, in addition to the Media Coverage of the events.

As of the signing of the Mine Ban Treaty in 1997 and the Ottawa Convention on Antipersonnel Landmines Prohibition in 1999, governments and media started to look closer at the landmine issue. However, there is a whole lot still to be done! Some of the governments haven’t still signed the agreements, rebel groups go on using the landmines and there are scarce human and financial resources for Mine Awareness and Mine Clearance of the existing fields.

The most affected Latin-American countries are Colombia (where, due to the ongoing conflict, the government, the guerillas and the paramilitary continue to place landmines on the jungle tracks and around the military facilities) and Nicaragua (where, even though it’s been more than 15 years since the civil war ended, economic difficulties are still a hindrance to the conclusion of the mined fields clearing). Guatemala intended to finish clearing the whole of its fields until the end of 2005 and El Salvador has got several suspicious spots. In addition to those countries, Peru and Ecuador still have mined spots along their frontiers since the last conflict in 1995.
Action Plan

Countries to be visited, activities schedule, compensation for the sponsors and need of investment

Our plan is to visit three South-American countries in the course of 2005/2006: Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. By means of the contacts we’ve made with several humanitarian organizations in that region, we intend to gain access to the activities of staking out and clearing the mined fields in each of those countries. We’re also going to visit hospitals in the most affected areas and get acquainted with the victims, so that we get to know the impact caused by mines on human beings. The government actions and the economic issues involved in the matter will be studied and presented based on interviews with local authorities and experts.

Although ambitious, the Targeting Landmines Project can be completed still in 2005/2006 with some partial results (such as articles in newspapers and magazines) reported just following each of our trips, and exhibits to be held and a book to be published in 2006/2007. The first travel, to Colombia, took place in 2005 and was a great success. The first exhibit is scheduled for the next World Social Forum, in January 2006 in Caracas, Venezuela. Some of our photos will also be shown in Europe and Latin-America at the 6ª Muestra de Documentales y Fotografías de América Latina, to be held by the Asociación ProDocumentales of Albacete, Spain. And the book has already obtained part of the needed support provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The institutional compensation for the Targeting the Landmines Project sponsors will be performed not only in the course of the project’s development, with the mention of their names in our articles, but also at its completion with the exhibits and book.

However, in order to carry out the Targeting Landmines Project we still need an investment of approximately US$ 10,000 to cover our expenses with equipment, basic resources, travels, lodging, translations and such. And an additional amount of US$ 20,000 will be needed for assembling and divulging the exhibit and publishing 1500 copies of the book. The investment doesn’t have to be made in one single occasion, or by a single sponsor, or necessarily in cash. Support in logistics, discounts in services, donation of photographic films and equipment, all of these can help to reduce the total amount needed for the project. We will periodically submit activities reports and rendering of accounts to the sponsors.
The Project’s Products

Exhibits, books, articles, media coverage, etc.

The first product to be generated by the Targeting Landmines Project would be an exhibit of the documentary photographs, just as has happened with the Angola – The Hope of a People Project, which has counted on the support from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and conquered a great repercussion on the main media vehicles in Brazil (magazines, newspapers, television and radio), generating dozens of articles and reports. A first small exhibit (with only the pictures from Colombia) is already scheduled to take place at the World Social Forum in January, in Caracas, Venezuela. This exhibit has got some support from the Colombian NGO Proyecto Justicia y Vida, Labtec and the Campaña Colombiana contra Minas.

A bigger exhibit with the photos of Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, are being prepared to take place later this year. The exhibit of the Angola’s project, for example, has been held in São Paulo, Brasília and Salvador.

The pictures of the Angola – The Hope of a People Project were also made available for unrestricted use by the ICRC, which used them in its 2003 Brazil International Committee of the Red Cross Calendar at the itinerant exhibit Even Wars Have Limits and in the ICRC pictures collections in Angola and Geneva. And that is just what we now offer to the sponsors of our new project.

Another product generated by the Targeting Landmines Project will be the publication of a book in Portuguese and Spanish which will provide a longer lasting presence and a greater institutional compensation to the sponsors. The International Committee of the Red Cross is the book’s first sponsor.

In addition to the media coverage of the Exhibit and the Book, we’ve got good contacts with a number of media companies in Brazil and abroad (such as Caros Amigos, Carta Capital, Folha de S.Paulo, Terra, Horizonte Geográfico, NoMínimo, Agência Brasil, Agência de Notícias Adital para a América Latina, Photoportal, Fotosite, WorldPress.Org, etc.), which are already publishing or will undoubtedly be interested in publishing articles and photos regarding the antipersonnel landmines issue in Latin America.
Background

The experience of the photographers with the landmines issue, contacts in the region and examples of some works

Our experience with the landmines issue began in 2002, when we covered the start of Angola reconstruction just after the signing of the peace treaty which put an end to a 27 year civil war in that African country. We made then good contacts and participated in lectures on the mines functioning and methods for landmine clearance, witnessed the clearance of some fields, and looked closely at the terrible injuries the landmines had caused to several of their victims. This work resulted in the exhibit and book *Angola – The Hope of a People*.

In early 2004 we visited part of the Kashmir territory, which is ruled by India, and passed by its border with Pakistan at the Punjab region, where the Indian government had new landmines planted less than 10 years ago. Due to the increasing number of civilian victims, the International Committee of the Red Cross is currently studying the possibility of helping the country’s government in Mine Awareness and offering the victims some kind of technical orthopedic assistance.

In late 2004 we established contacts with a number of humanitarian organizations in Colombia, in the course of a job regarding the urban violence and the Médecins Sans Frontières’ work, and we found out that Colombia is likely to be the third country with the greatest number of landmines victims in the whole world. However, this is a piece of information that reaches very few people even inside the country borders, and fewer still in neighboring countries like Brazil. In our view, it is crucial to bring the discussion on this issue back to the persons’ attention!