

Deaf children gain language and acceptance in rural Bolivia

PAGE 2



Ensuring healthy babies and mothers in the DRC

PAGE 3



A U.S. mom transforms her loss into action for peace

PAGE 4



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www.handicap-international.us

50 years after U.S. bombing of Laos, explosives still a threat

NEWS

In October 1966, an item the size of an apple changed Phet Latxabout's life forever. "I was walking with three friends when my foot hit an unexploded cluster munition," said Phet, now 68. "It exploded instantly, shattering the bones in my left leg and peppering my whole body with metal fragments. Two of my friends were also injured, and one died."

She had stepped on a U.S. munition dropped on her country, Laos, during the Vietnam War. Laos was not fighting in the war, but the U.S. conducted about 600,000 bombing missions over the country, with an aim to cut supply lines to North Vietnam. More than 270 million cluster munitions rained on Laos over nine years. An estimated 80 million cluster munitions did not explode on impact. Fifty years after the start of the bombing campaign, millions of bombs still lay hidden in fields, waterways, and forests.

Since 1964, these explosive remnants of war (ERW) have killed or injured more than 50,000 Laotians. It was only in 2000, during the presidency of Bill Clinton, that the U.S. government recognized the extent of its Laos bombing campaigns¹.

However, current U.S. funding to support ERW clearance in Laos falls far short. For 2014, Congress committed \$12 million for clearance operations. By comparison, the U.S. spent an estimated \$17 million per day on bombing missions during the war.²

After the explosion, Phet's friends brought her to a doctor who amputated her left leg. "I gradually learned to live without my leg," she said. Today, Phet has six children and six grandchildren. In 2008, Handicap International found Phet and fit her with her very first prosthetic leg.

Thanks to donors like you, Handicap International has helped victims of ERW in Laos since 1983, and our deminers have destroyed more than 17,000 bombs since 2006.

Phet also works alongside Handicap International as a member of Ban Advocates, a group of cluster munition survivors who advocate internationally for a ban on cluster munitions and landmines. Phet's testimony has helped convince numerous countries to join the Convention on Cluster Munitions, which bans the use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of these weapons.



Handicap International deminers remove and later destroy a bomb found in Savannakhet, Laos.

U.S. takes tentative steps toward joining Mine Ban Treaty



The U.S. has yet to join the 161 countries that have signed the Mine Ban Treaty. However, on June 27, at the Mine Ban Conference in Mozambique, the U.S. shifted its policy on landmines, promising in a statement that it "will not produce or otherwise acquire any anti-personnel landmines that are not

compliant with the Ottawa Convention in the future..." Such steps would "ultimately allow us to accede [to the treaty]."

"It gives us great relief that the U.S. is banning the production of these deadly weapons," said Elizabeth MacNair, executive director of Handicap International U.S.

Yet, the statement failed

to detail when President Obama might submit the treaty to the Senate for ratification. The statement also did not commit to a full ban of the use of anti-personnel landmines.

Handicap International will continue its work to encourage the U.S. to fully comply with the Mine Ban Treaty.

Bosnian landmines



In May, intense rain in Bosnia caused flooding and landslides which displaced landmines leftover from the country's war following the breakup of Yugoslavia. Handicap International had spent 15 years in Bosnia reducing the impact of explosive remnants of war. The organization has now renewed its presence, running risk awareness sessions with local organizations to help people avoid dislodged mines.

Crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan



In response to the influx of displaced Iraqis into Kurdistan following the advance of ISIS, Handicap International launched an emergency response to ensure that people with disabilities, the injured, and other at-risk individuals can access essential aid and services. Handicap International plans to provide aid to 1,500 people in the districts of Dohuk and Erbil by mid-September. The organization has been present in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991.



With her prosthesis, Phet Latxabout is better able to do housework and look after her family.

1. http://legaciesofwar.org/files/Critical_Asian_Studies-Legacies_of_War_Cluster_Bombs_in_Laos.pdf
2. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/03/laos-vietnam-war-us-bombing-uxo>



Judith practices sign language after receiving instruction from Handicap International in Cotagaita, Bolivia.

Note from the Executive Director



As a dear friend of Handicap International, I hope you'll enjoy our third issue of *The Next Step*.

On June 27, we celebrated an important shift in U.S. landmine policy. While we remain a long way away from celebrating U.S. ratification of the Mine Ban Treaty, it gave the Handicap International family great relief that the U.S. is banning the production and purchase of these deadly weapons.

However, the U.S. failed to commit to a full ban of the use of anti-personnel landmines, and it didn't provide any timeline for President Obama to submit the treaty to the U.S. Senate for ratification.

As you can see in our cover story about Laos, the world's most heavily cluster bomb-polluted country, the U.S. narrative on explosive remnants of war is far from complete. I'm so grateful for your support in places like Laos where weapons from past conflicts continue to haunt innocent civilians.

Thank you for being part of our vital work to clear these weapons and aid the victims.

Beth MacNair
Executive Director

The gift of language

Handicap International empowers children with disabilities in Bolivia

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Imagine being unable to communicate with the world around you. You hear only silence and the people around you cannot understand the words that come out of your mouth.

This is a reality for countless children born deaf or with other disabilities. In the world's least developed

countries, children with disabilities often face a double disability—their own physical or intellectual impairment plus long-held cultural beliefs that being disabled is divine punishment or a curse. Not only do these children lack access to appropriate care and rehabilitation, they are often excluded from school and family life.

Handicap International

works in rural, poor communities like Cotagaita, Bolivia, to help children with disabilities get the support they need and acceptance they deserve. Your donations help kids like seven-year-old Judith, who was born deaf and could only express herself using facial expressions and hand gestures.

Judith is now in school. Our team not only taught her

sign language, but they also trained teachers at a local school how to communicate with her, and how to help her gain acceptance in the classroom. She is even teaching her younger brother, Alex, who is also deaf, how to communicate. A whole new world of storytelling and understanding has developed between the siblings.

A new leg for Ahlam, 8, Syrian bombing survivor



© Elias Saade/Handicap International



THE BIG PICTURE

March 27, 2014 →

A Handicap International physical therapist determined that Ahlam was a good candidate for a prosthesis. He began performing a series of rehabilitation exercises with Ahlam to ensure she would be strong enough to walk with a prosthesis.



© Elias Saade/Handicap International

→ March 1, 2014

In September 2013, Ahlam, 8, had her leg amputated after being injured during a bombing raid in Hama, Syria. Her mother brought her to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley on March 1 to seek better care. A few weeks later, one of Handicap International's mobile rehabilitation teams discovered Ahlam living in a tent city.

April 24, 2014 →

Her "new leg" is ready. "With two legs I'll be able to play with my friends, run around, and most of all, go to school," said Ahlam. "I love school—I was top of my class in Syria."



© Elias Saade/Handicap International



Joseph, 11 months, visits a rehabilitation center in Kinshasa to do physical therapy in order to improve the flexibility of his arms.

Ensuring healthier babies in the DRC



Handicap International works to prevent and manage disabilities in newborns

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 5% of children grow up with a disability. One major cause of this tragic fact: the lack of good health care for pregnant women and newborns. Public health structures in the DRC are woefully underfunded and overcrowded, lacking in trained staff, proper equipment, and even in basic hygiene. Quality care is available in private hospitals and clinics, but the majority of Congolese cannot afford the expense of this care.

In addition to the lack of affordable, good quality healthcare, most poor Congolese women are uneducated about the importance of receiving pre- and postnatal care: Disability can be prevented through proper prenatal care and can be detected early and managed when a newborn is monitored by a healthcare professional.

To address this challenge, Handicap International manages

An estimated 5% of children in the DRC grow up disabled.

a mother and child health program in the neighborhood of Bumbu Sembao in the capital of Kinshasa to prevent and diagnose disability in newborns. Community volunteers travel throughout the area to distribute information about disability prevention and organize weekly awareness sessions with mothers. Now, 130 to 150 expecting mothers visit the local Kitokimosi Health Center each month for prenatal care.

Handicap International has trained 40 people working at the Kitokimosi Health Center to counsel pregnant mothers about health practices that can help prevent disability. For example, staff advise mothers that during childbirth, the baby's arms should not be pulled, as this practice can lead to paralysis.

Health center staff are also trained on how to spot early signs of disability in newborns and older babies. When disability is identified early in life and follow up care is prescribed, a child is much more likely to have a better outcome as he or she gets older.

In partnership with the Clinical University of Kinshasa and the Institute of Higher Medical Techniques, Handicap International ensures that children diagnosed with cerebral palsy receive physical therapy to lessen the impact of the condition. Community rehabilitation teams work with 30 to 40 children with cerebral palsy each day. Handicap International's "Always Free" mobile clinic enables children to continue their rehabilitation at home.

Aiding victims of violence in North Kivu, DRC

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

The unspeakable brutality of armed groups in the North Kivu province of the DRC has left countless civilians with severe disabling injuries. Musa was just four months old when rebels attacked his village. With a machete, they cut off his fingers and toes. He grew up in pain and unable to walk properly.

Nine years later, Handicap International staff discovered Musa

in a camp. Staff brought Musa to a hospital in Goma where corrective surgery was performed so that he could be fitted with a prosthetic leg.

Musa is just one of our beneficiaries with a disability resulting from violence, gunshots, or explosive remnants of war. Thanks to donors like you, we can provide these traumatized individuals with mobility aids, rehabilitation, referrals for surgery, and also the funds to go to school or start a small business.



“Our donors are key to fighting injustice”



Florence Daunis is the Deputy Executive Director, Field Programs

The DRC is among the poorest countries in Africa, where 89% of people live on less than \$2 per day. An estimated 10 million Congolese have disabilities. Over the last 15 years, civil war in the eastern part of country has resulted in millions of deaths and injuries and massive population displacement. Faced with the DRC's staggering needs, Handicap International employs its full spectrum of services, from rehabilitation and preventive care to emergency assistance.

In the capital of Kinshasa, our disability prevention program for mothers and children enjoys great success. Our demining teams in Orientale and Maniema provinces cleared more than 387,500 square feet of land since December 2013. Across the country in North Kivu province, where ongoing violence makes any humanitarian response a challenge, our mobile emergency platform provides transport, storage, and logistics support to 30 other humanitarian organizations, despite treacherous roads and insecurity.

In displaced persons camps around Goma, the capital of North Kivu, our teams work tirelessly to seek out people with disabilities to ensure they can access humanitarian aid and services. We connect people with amputations or other mobility challenges, especially victims of armed violence, with rehabilitative care.

There are still many more needs to be met in the DRC, and yet, the media and international community rarely give the country's problems much attention. In this context, Handicap International's presence is essential. Our donors are key to fighting the many injustices facing the people of the DRC.

Background

History

After gaining its independence in 1960, the DRC suffered from severe economic deterioration and civil unrest under the 32-year rule of President Mobutu. In 1994, a massive influx of refugees fleeing the Rwanda genocide destabilized eastern DRC and triggered a civil war, which has left an estimated five million people dead. Fighting between armed groups continues to displace and victimize civilians. Out of 187 countries, the DRC is ranked 186 on the Human Development Index.

Mandate

Present in the DRC since 1995, Handicap International provides rehabilitation to people with disabilities and victims of violence, promotes the inclusion of children with disabilities in schools, clears landmines and explosive remnants of war, works to prevent disabilities in babies, and provides logistics support to other NGOs.

U.S. mom turns loss into action for peace

INTERVIEW

On August 1, a celebration in Laos for the fourth anniversary of the treaty banning cluster munitions featured a documentary about a Laotian woman whose husband had a lethal encounter with a cluster munition. The blast left her with life-long injuries, as well as a voice of indignation: no one should fear death from a war that ended more than 40 years ago.

The pain felt personal to an American in the crowd, Lynn Bradach. On July 2, 2003, Bradach's son, a U.S. Marine serving in Iraq, died when his team accidentally detonated an unexploded cluster bomb submunition. "The U.S. had fired thousands of these barbaric, inhumane little bomblets at the beginning of the invasion," Bradach said. "Now, because of the submunitions' large failure rate, viable bomblets still lay scattered about waiting for unsuspecting victims."

Since 2003, Bradach has channeled her pain and anger into action. First, she learned all she could about cluster munitions—weapons she calls "antiquated." Indeed, the initial purpose of these weapons—explosives which open up midair releasing dozens of smaller bomblets over a wide area—was to slow down advancing troops and artillery. "This type of war ceased to be waged long ago," Bradach said. "It was wrong to use them in Iraq from the very beginning."

"If even the best trained military personnel can accidentally fall victim to this weapon, how on earth do we expect civilians to return safely to a land littered with them?"



Lynn Bradach, center, stands with fellow Ban Advocates at the Third Meeting of States Parties for the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Bradach also joined Handicap International's Ban Advocates, a group of cluster bomb and landmine survivors that advocates for the international campaigns to ban cluster bombs and landmines. Her goal? To see the U.S. join the two international treaties that would rid America's arsenal of these indiscriminate weapons.

During her trip to the most heavily cluster bombed country on earth, Bradach met with Laotian survivors. She also handed U.S. Embassy officials a list of 40,000 Handicap International supporters asking President Obama to submit the Mine Ban Treaty to the Senate for ratification.

"We have started to move in the right direction," she said of the U.S. promise in June to ban the production and purchase of anti-personnel landmines. "However, the time frame is too slow. Too many innocent civilians in other countries have had to live with this deadly situation for far too long. It is time for the Obama administration to demonstrate a true act of peace and accede to the Mine Ban Treaty."

"The dream of every parent is that the world they leave to their child be a better one than the one they themselves came into," Bradach said. "We pray that each generation learns from the mistakes of the last. My son left me because of the mistakes of an earlier generation. He has left me to try to make it a better world. It is up to me to ask my country to stand up and be the nation he believed he was fighting for."

"We cannot give a child back their arms, their legs, or their lives. We cannot give a parent back their child, or a wife her husband, but we can prevent this tragedy from happening again, and care for those who have been impacted."

Bradach's visit to Laos saw her speaking at a Handicap International event marking 20 years of clearance by the Laos government. She joined fellow Ban Advocate, Thoummy, in praising the Laos government for its commitment to mine action, but also pushing them to extend more support for victims, mine risk education, and the clearance of cluster bombs.

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ReachOut@handicap-international.us

Give a gift they can count on

Each and every day, Handicap International is at work in the lives of people like Phet, Judith, Ahlam, and Musa. As a member of our monthly giving program, you can ensure we continue repairing lives in situations of disaster, conflict, and poverty. With as little as \$10.00 a month, you can:

- Give children with disabilities a chance for education
- Help those who have lost a limb walk again
- Provide emergency relief to people with disabilities following natural disasters
- Sustain our efforts to clear landmines and return safe land to local communities

To join our monthly giving program, just fill out the reply form and return it to Handicap International with the enclosed envelope. Your sustaining gift will have a daily impact on the lives of the people we serve while making it easy for you to give month after month without the need for any additional paperwork. Please make Handicap International part of your monthly charitable giving today. Thank you in advance for your commitment.



Grace, 8, who had her leg amputated, attends a disability inclusive school supported by Handicap International.