Landmines

Legacy of Death

Photo essay by Don Doll, S.J.
Editor’s Note: Some of the photos in this story will be disturbing to the reader. Beyond the politics of the landmines issue is the truth of human suffering that Fr. Doll witnessed.

Top: A grim game ...
Because children often encounter landmines, they must learn to identify them quickly in the field, hence this board game of recognition. Children often lose an arm, leg or a life to these remnants of war in Angola.

Far Left: Augusto Baptista Chimuna, 33, stands with his family outside of the tent where they have lived for four years. With the Angolan civil war raging, these IDPs (internally displaced persons) cannot return to their homes.

Above: A sampling of deactivated landmines found around Luena, Angola. The ordnance includes anti-tank mines (top row), ‘bounding bettys’ which leap into the air and have a wide killing radius, and anti-personnel mines.

Up to 200 million of them are scattered across the earth, hidden in the soil of about 64 countries, mostly developing nations already ravaged by war. About two million more of the devices are installed each year. (Although in 1997 the U.S. agreed to destroy some of its stockpile, we still continue to produce others.)

In many developing nations, no one knows exactly where these frightening devices are placed; they can detonate at any time, anywhere, set off by the random brush of a foot,
often the foot of a child.
Many are about the size of a hockey puck and are cheap to make and to install, about $3 a piece. To remove them is a much more costly business, ranging up to $1,000 each. In many countries, removing them means scraping away the earth a centimeter at a time. “They’ll still be here in 100 years,” says one discouraged worker in Angola. It’s easy to lose heart: For every one that is removed, 20 more will be installed.
Their presence renders the land useless, as the people are afraid to disturb the soil. The economy suffers.
Each day, about 150 people are killed or injured by them. Anti-personnel landmines. Meant to kill and maim.

When Creighton priest/photographer Don Doll, S.J., journeyed to Angola last March, he saw the results of these terrible remnants of war:

Children with missing limbs, orphans, a young father or mother struck down in the prime of life. Here, the earth is riddled with 10 million landmines; that's one for every person in the country. Of its population of 10 million, 70,000 Angolese are amputees.

The destruction wreaked by anti-personnel landmines has become the target of a worldwide crusade. In October, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and its American coordinator Jody Williams were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In December in Ottawa, President
Clinton represented the only hold-out Western nation left to join a worldwide treaty to ban and clear all anti-personnel landmines.

In 1994 the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) adopted the goals of the International Campaign. The JRS strategy has been to accompany and serve those hurt by mines; help survivors tell their stories; include solid ethical reflection, and join forces with national campaigns.

President Clinton remains committed to the use of anti-personnel mines in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea.

Pentagon officials believe that such weapons, meant to keep intact anti-tank mines, are essential to the defense of South Korea. Other U.S. opponents to the ban suggest options to signing the Ottawa treaty, including signing with reservations; signing the treaty and letting the U.S. Senate
state any reservations or working with the United Nations on another treaty. Some even suggest the best answer is resolving the problem of the two Koreas.

“One thing about the landmines issue,” Fr. Doll said, “is that it is not an abstraction. The United States is the largest arms seller in the world. If the U.S. sells $20 billion worth of fighter planes, then the receiving country does not have those funds available for health care and education for their people. But that’s an abstract concept.

“With landmines, there’s no abstraction. You see what happens. You see the results ... I’ve never been to a country where there’s so little joy in children’s eyes.”