

# The Issue of Landmines

There are an estimated 110 million landmines scattered in over 60 countries, most of them in the developing world.<sup>3,4,9,10,11</sup> Landmines do not distinguish between the footfalls of soldiers and children, and continue to injure and kill long after conflict has ended. Worldwide over 2000 people are killed or wounded by a landmine explosion each month.<sup>3</sup> Mine explosions cause injury either directly by the blast or by driving dirt and debris into the tissue and bone, causing infections and requiring high-level amputations.<sup>12,13</sup> Injuries are complex, involving crushes, burns, penetrating fragments and incisions. The fifty percent of victims who live to make it to hospital often require extensive and prolonged medical care and rehabilitation, which is often not available from already poorly-funded and over-stretched health services.<sup>15</sup>

Currently there are at least 250,000 persons disabled by landmines in the world.<sup>3</sup> The six most severely affected countries; Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, harbor almost one-third of the world's landmines.<sup>3,15</sup> There is a disproportionate impact on the world's poorest societies and often the most vulnerable members of those societies. Basic necessity forces farmers, refugees, and the displaced to enter mined areas for food, water, firewood, thatch, and to graze livestock.<sup>3</sup> These same people rely on physical fitness for survival and can least afford the care necessary to treat landmine injuries.

The effects of landmines go beyond physical impairment. It has been reported that amputee survivors experience loss of income, feelings of abandonment and depression, and are 40% more likely to experience difficulty providing food for their families.<sup>7,14</sup> Amputees are often viewed by their families and communities as unproductive.<sup>17</sup> Contributing to the problem may be the lack of prostheses which, in one

survey, 60% of the amputees had to do without.<sup>16</sup> Most developing countries do not have adequate rehabilitation or prosthetic fabrication centres to meet the needs of the population,<sup>4,7,15,16</sup> and rehabilitation services in the countries most severely affected by landmines only cover an estimated 15-20 percent of the needs of the physically disabled.<sup>10</sup>

The International Committee of the Red Cross has stated that the services of medical professionals are needed to help reduce the physical and mental trauma caused by mines.<sup>9,10</sup> Medical professionals and others involved in caring for the injured have emphasized the need for epidemiological information on mine injuries and the need to gather objective data on the short- and long-term socioeconomic consequences of landmines.<sup>10</sup> Steps are needed to improve the situation of mine-injury survivors, which includes better medical attention in the short run and help to adapt to their impairment and rebuild their lives.

As the issue of landmines becomes an increasingly important international issue and more funds are targeted towards landmine-related causes, the need for increased assistance for landmine-injury survivors should not be overlooked. However, while addressing the needs of persons with an amputation due to a landmine injury, one must recognize that all persons with physical impairment in a similar environment would potentially encounter similar challenges. For that reason, investigation into disability issues and subsequent interventions should be inclusive of all persons with a particular impairment, and not restricted to those with a particular etiology of impairment. This was the guiding principle in developing this project, implementing the objectives, and formulating our recommendations.