

## MAG EVENTS

MAG needs participants for two exciting events in 2006 and by taking part you could help rid the world of landmines.



### Spirit of Jordan

Explore the dramatic red desert and ancient landscape of Jordan on this long-weekend trek on 23-27 March 2006. The challenge follows ancient routes through red sands and past towering cliffs before ending at the lost city of Petra. It costs £150 to register and participants are asked to raise a minimum amount of sponsorship.



### London to Paris Bike Ride

Challenge yourself to complete this three-day cycle ride from capital to capital. The beautiful 300km route passes through sleepy Normandy villages and stunning countryside before ending at the Eiffel Tower. The final day is yours, free to explore Paris before returning to London on Eurostar. It costs just £95 to register and participants are asked to raise a minimum amount in sponsorship.

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I am a taxpayer and wish MAG to treat all donations I have made since 6th April 2000 as Gift Aid donations, until further notice.

Note: you must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax equal to the tax deducted from your donation (currently 28p for every pound given).

If you prefer not to receive MAG News and updates direct to your door please tick here. MAG will not pass your details to any other organisation.

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News9/05

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autumn 2005



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- Rebuilding Bridges in Angola

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**MAG** saves lives builds futures

## FROM BLOODSHED TO HOPE

Picture the scene: a brother and sister laughing and playing games together near their home in Vellavelly, Sri Lanka. There's a moment's silence then, in a split second, their laughter turns to screams as a landmine detonates beneath their feet. The six-year-old girl, Nilojini, suffered horrific shrapnel wounds to her face, chest and throat, while her brother, Diloshan, aged eight, lost his arm in the explosion and sadly later died in hospital. This tragedy happened several months before MAG began work in the town.

During the conflict between the Sri Lankan Army and the Tamil Tigers the vast majority of inhabitants fled as the town was taken over by intense fighting. When the army withdrew and the community returned, the surrounding minefield had a severe impact on the townspeople's ability to farm, herd cattle, raise goats and even walk to the edge of town without threat of injury or even death.

In response to this desperate humanitarian need, MAG deployed two Mine Action Teams (MATs) to the town and worked for six months to clear a massive 35,600 sq / m of land (the size of nine football pitches). This land is now safe and thankfully no further lives or limbs will be lost, due to the presence of landmines or bombs. In spite of the tragedy of the past the townspeople are able to farm, develop the land and resettle without fear. MAG has given the community of Vellavelly a real sense of hope for the future.

Story by Parameswaran Panchadcharam, community liaison assistant, Sri Lanka



The remnants of conflict provide a dangerous playground for many Sri Lankan children.

## TSUNAMI UPDATE

Over six months have now passed since the tsunami and in terms of clearing, MAG Sri Lanka have been working solidly in those areas worst hit by the disaster. The table below shows the activity that has taken place and the number of items found.

AREA	ACTIVITY	ITEMS FOUND
Kallady (completed)	Manual Clearance: 417,975 sq metres Mechanical Clearance: 83,000 sq metres	6 Anti-Personnel Landmines 9 items of UXO
Kallah (completed)	Manual Clearance: 6,735 sq metres	115 items of UXO 714 items of ammunition
Mankerney (completed)	Manual Clearance: 453,576 sq metres	25 Anti-Personnel Landmines 298 items of UXO 5,116 items of ammunition
Kyankerney (completed)	Manual Clearance: 122,064 sq metres	No mines or UXO found
Kalkudah / Passikudah (ongoing)	Manual Clearance: 225,059 sq metres	385 Anti-Personnel Landmines 30 items of UXO

To date four sites have been completed and one is ongoing. 416 Anti-Personnel Landmines, 452 items of UXO and 5,830 items of ammunition have been found and destroyed.

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CL	Community Liaison
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
MAT	Mine Action Team
MRE	Mine Risk Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

## DANGER ON THE DOORSTEP

"We were later told that if we'd tried to move the landmine, our bodies would have been torn apart. Every time I think about it, about not being here for my two lovely daughters, I feel sick with fear." There's relief in 25-year-old Nhao Oun's voice as she talks about the incident that happened in Boueng Prey village, Snoeng commune, Cambodia.



Nhao Oun with her daughters outside her home, from where she runs a small grocery store.

Recently Nhao Oun and her husband uncovered a large, round, green object while digging in the rice field outside their home. "At first we didn't know what it was, so we called a neighbour to come over and have a look." Their neighbour identified the object as an anti-tank landmine and remarked that they were extremely lucky that they hadn't detonated it.

Although the village isn't in one of MAG's high priority clearance areas, we have an Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team based in Snoeng commune to respond to emergency situations such as this. The EOD team's task is to react to specific requests from communities where ordnance has been found. When the team arrived they discovered that there were in fact two landmines laid on top of each other; a situation even more dangerous than first thought. Eventually they were able to remove both landmines and took them away to be destroyed.

The experience reminded the whole community, not only about the physical hazards on the doorstep, but also about how to deal with them safely and effectively. "I am still scared of working in the fields around here. I'm sure that there must be more items lying buried, perhaps even in our own rice field – but now I know how to report it, I'll definitely contact the MAG teams," says Oun. "I'm pleased to have them come here as much as possible."

Story and photograph by Pao Dara Rassmey, project officer, Cambodia

## PARTNERS IN PROGRESS AND LIFE

Almeshref is a Lebanese farming village located on a beautiful hill full of oak, pine and olive trees and facing the Al Damour beaches and sea. However, the picturesque location belies a hidden danger the residents have lived with for over 23 years. Until recently, landmines were buried across the agricultural lands and between the olive trees as a result of Israeli activities in 1982. This meant that the villagers were unable to farm in safety, a factor that hit the local economy hard. After the war ended in 1990 and the community started to return, the presence of landmines severely impacted on their future.

In 2000 a Saudi Arabian businessman began to invest in the village, building residential areas, public gardens, parks and a sports club. He also helped to restore the local church, university, nun seminary and health centre. The residents were delighted with these investments, but they were aware that landmines were still present.

Earlier this year, MAG was asked to help and, after gaining permission from the Lebanese National Demining Office, we sent a team to conduct emergency clearance. A Mine Action Team (MAT) cleared an access track 40 metres long and 2.5 metres wide. This cleared track allowed four families, who owned the adjacent lands, to access the olive groves and to cultivate their land. The work was finished in April 2005 and now more than 60 families are able to safely use other land close to the track.

Almeshref is now much safer and the residents are delighted that the work carried out by MAG means that they can farm without fear and their children can play in safety. They wanted to thank MAG, and those who supported the clearance operation. As one resident said: "MAG are our partners in progress and in life."

Story and photograph by Ali Shuaib, MAG contact officer, Lebanon



MAG contact officer, Ali Shuaib, with local landowners and a community representative

## LEADING THE WAY

MAG has become the first organisation of its kind to complete a pilot survey and clearance project in the isolated south-eastern region of the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The project team was based in a remote area where the vast majority of the population had fled into neighbouring Zambia during the war and had only recently started returning home. Much of the country's infrastructure has been devastated by years of war and neglect – roads and bridges are often in very bad condition, making travel extremely difficult, and basic services such as health centres are often completely absent.

Frequently termed "Africa's First World War", the conflict involved a wide range of factions and forces from up to ten other countries. Whilst much of the fighting has now stopped, the DRC remains one of the poorest countries in the world and continues to suffer from the aftermath of the war.

Landmines and other explosive devices add to this suffering, particularly in the south-east of the country. As part of the survey and clearance project, MAG visited all the local communities to gather information about the dangers faced by villagers. A team was then sent to clear the reported items, so that the local people could take another step towards rebuilding their communities. Some of the areas visited were so remote that the villagers were not even aware that the war had ended. When conducting demolitions of explosive items, the team had to be careful that everyone in the surrounding area knew what was happening, so that they did not think the fighting was occurring nearby, and flee their village.

MAG is now seeking to follow up on this project with an extensive survey in another area of the country. Much of the DRC is affected by landmines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO), and the country requires assistance in order to stabilise and continue on the long road to recovery.

Story by Llewelyn Jones, member of the survey team, DRC  
Photographs by the survey team, DRC



Collecting information about landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) was a crucial part of the survey and clearance project in DRC



Destroying landmines and other explosive devices in a controlled explosion in Katanga province, DRC

## STAY IN THE TRACKS

On the side of a dirt road, lies an abandoned truck tilting to one side, half its carriage a wreck of twisted metal. This is not an unfamiliar sight for people living and working in Sudan, where vehicle carcasses can be found along most major routes. Faced with the prospect of crossing a large and flooded pothole, the driver took his vehicle off-road to find an easier route. This decision almost cost him his life and resulted in the detonation of an anti-tank landmine, one of many found on the side of the road. Miraculously the driver escaped with injuries but other drivers are not always so lucky. The signing of the peace accords in January 2005 means that safety when travelling by road has become an increasingly important issue as trade and population movement are set to increase significantly.

In response to this, MAG and our local Sudanese partner OSIL (Operation Save Innocent Lives) is implementing an innovative mine risk education (MRE) campaign called Stay in the Tracks. The aim is to ensure that drivers have the knowledge to keep themselves and their passengers safe while travelling through the country. MAG community liaison (CL) teams are delivering targeted MRE to drivers crossing the border into southern Sudan, training key staff within transport companies and non-government organisations (NGOs) and distributing a Stay in the Tracks management pack to support them in this task. The CL teams are also designing and producing posters and signs for display in customs offices, police stations, on and in vehicles, by the roadside and at common stopping points. Although still in the early stages, there have already been signs of success. Requests are coming in from

local authorities, NGOs and commercial transport companies to extend activities to include other road users, such as cyclists. MAG's innovative approach to MRE has had real impact as other agencies have expressed an interest in adopting the Stay in the Tracks campaign in their areas of operation.

Story by Annelise Dennis, community liaison advisor, Sudan



"Stay in the Tracks" is the message of MAG's campaign in southern Sudan



MAG's community liaison staff highlight the dangers of straying from the road to a group of truck drivers in southern Sudan



The destructive result of not staying in the tracks in Sudan

Welcome to the autumn edition of MAG News.

At a time when the world's attention is focused on Africa, it is clear how landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contribute to the poverty cycle for many people in conflict-affected countries there. MAG works tirelessly not only in Africa, but also in the middle east and south east Asia, making towns, villages and communities safe for returning refugees, clearing farmland so that crops can be grown and cattle raised, and educating civilians about the dangers that still surround them.

Specifically you'll hear about our survey and clearance project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, our groundbreaking "Stay in the Tracks" Mine Risk Education campaign in southern Sudan and how land in Angola was cleared, allowing bridges to be rebuilt so that vital aid could be delivered to an isolated village. Other articles feature an update on our clearance work in Sri Lanka following the Tsunami, making homes safe in a Cambodian village and returning land in Lebanon.

Together with your support, we're able to save lives in all the countries where we work, and support communities in building futures for themselves.



Lou McGrath  
MAG Executive Director

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## BRIDGES TO THE FUTURE

"We have no school and no health clinic," says the Soba, (village leader) of Lutembu. "The future for our children is not a bright one." Vital social services are needed by the people of Lutembu village in Lumbala Nguimbo municipality, Angola. Moreover, it is proving almost impossible to bring in the resources that are available, because the bridges surrounding the village have all been destroyed. The clear solution to this would be to rebuild the bridges, but when the land surrounding the bridge sites is contaminated by landmines and other unexploded ordnance (UXO), building the bridge to a better future for the people of Lutembu is not as safe or as simple as it first appears.

The humanitarian response to the problems of Lutembu and villages like it is comprehensive and very much a team effort. MAG directly addresses the issue of landmine and UXO contamination and by working in partnership with other agencies, provides solutions for the wider concerns, such as the lack of good road networks. By improving roads for government bodies, including the Ministry of Health and international NGOs, such as Medair, we have facilitated the much needed food aid and health services to vulnerable communities.

Since spring 2005, MAG has also been working with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Angola to support its bridge reconstruction strategy. Using each agency's expertise, MAG and WFP have worked together to combat the colossal problem of access. Here MAG cleared the road to the bridge site and the area surrounding it in coordination with Norwegian People's Aid (a demining agency), and WFP provided and built the new bridges. Only through the landmine clearance carried out by MAG's teams has WFP been able to reconstruct the bridges in safety. And only through the construction of these bridges can vital food and medical supplies reach vulnerable communities.

New bridges provide stepping-stones to a better road network and increased access, which in turn, will provide a better future for the people of Lutembu village.

Story and photograph by Lydia Good, programme officer, Angola



The new bridge crossing the river Luanginga to the village of Lutembu

MAG wishes to thank the following donors for making our work and publications such as this possible: Ministerie van Buitenland Zaken, Department of International Development (UK), Office for Weapons Removal & Abatement (US), Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO), AAR Japan, Medico International, Stichting Vluchteling, Europe Aid, Survey Action Centre, Medicines Sans Frontiers, Zero Landmine Campaign, Adopt-A-Minefield, Roots of Peace, Manx Landmine Action, Governments of Japan, Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Sweden (SIDA), Norway, Finland, Jersey Overseas Aid, Guernsey Overseas Aid, Freeman Foundation, UNMAS, UNICEF, ALS, UNDP, SPAS and our loyal members from the general public who are part of MAG's growing community.