

# Empowering the victims of explosive violence

**Nigel Ellway** announces a new campaign – initiated by the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group on Explosive Threats in association with several charities – that is focusing on caring for and empowering those impacted by explosive violence

**A** 175 per cent rise in the victims of explosive violence since 2011, and a 45 per cent increase on 2016 figures. These two dramatic statistics led the United Kingdom All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Explosive

Threats to undertake an inquiry into how these numbers impact on the governments and agencies that provide funding and support to the victims and their families.

The APPG on Explosive Threats ensures that UK politicians are kept up to speed on the issues and activities of mine-action and victim assistance organisations – and on UK policy and humanitarian funding.

Earlier this year, the APPG wrote to over 30 organisations around the world, inviting them to submit evidence – from policymakers and academics, to on-the-ground practitioners. What the group seeks to

achieve is both a broad overview of the issues, as well as some hard details on which to build recommendations for suitable policy change and implementation.

The group wants to know why, despite the excellent work of the mine action community, casualty numbers have been going up, and what policy and funding changes governments will need to make.

The evidence is being condensed into a discussion document for a conference in Parliament in May, from which recommendations will be developed and presented to ministers and the international community.

The APPG has teamed up with four charities to run an awareness campaign alongside the inquiry. Called Reduce Explosive Violence, Increase Victim Empowerment (Revive), it aims to raise the profile of the people and organisations involved in supporting the innocent individuals and communities whose lives are blighted by explosive weapons – be they landmines, IEDs, unexploded remnants of war or weapons used in conflict.

The partners in Revive are: Emergency UK, which sends doctors and medical staff out to run trauma hospitals in places like Erbil in Iraq; Action on Armed Violence (see p68), which researches explosive violence incidents around the world and provides the APPG with statistics and

*Making prosthetic limbs in Angola*

Giles Duley

information to brief parliamentarians; Find a Better Way, set up by Sir Bobby Charlton to support research into better landmine detection and prosthetic support for victims; and the International Refugee Trust, as explosive violence is a major cause of people having to leave their homes.

There will also be a fifth new charity joining the Revive coalition – to be announced in June.

Increasingly, explosive weapons are being used around the world, both in conflict and as weapons of terror, with a devastating impact on the lives of innocent people and societies.

The work of the de-mining charities is legendary, with very high profile supporters – and without their efforts there would be far more victims. However, the work of the organisations dealing with the aftermath and the victims of explosive violence is less publicised, yet the challenges are as wide ranging and as long lasting.

Revive is specifically designed to ensure that the work in helping people rebuild their lives and their communities receives the recognition it deserves.

Mine action organisations are working tirelessly around the world – but it has been said that it will take at least a thousand years to clear all the explosive weapons currently globally – and cost up to \$33 (£28.86) billion. Set against this context, we need to be prepared for thousands of future victims.

In 2014, 34,758 people were recorded by Action on Armed Violence as having been killed or injured by explosive weapons (higher if one considers those not recorded) – 78 per cent of these were innocent civilians. But these are not the only victims.

Some explosive weapons create victims without ever being activated. Landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are both impersonal and indiscriminate – they are designed to instil fear, and often to maim rather than kill.

Sustainable Development Goals are an admirable ambition. But none of these goals are achievable unless there is a bedrock of peace and security on which they can be built.

Delivering healthcare, education and vital infrastructure is hard enough in many countries, but in places where people live in constant fear, particularly from explosive violence, it is almost impossible. Conflict traps people in poverty and deprivation.

The UN cites five 'pillars' of mine action, explained below.

The most familiar one – thanks in part to those famous photographs of Princess Diana – is that of demining or the clearance of the explosive legacy from past conflicts. This mostly involves landmines and unexploded ordnance. Demining activity is long and arduous, involving technical surveys, mapping, marking unsafe areas, clearance work and documenting areas that have been cleared. 'Past conflict' may be a somewhat misleading term – as much mine-action work is being undertaken in countries still riven by violence.

The second pillar is mine risk education, which is aimed at reducing the risk of injury from mines and unexploded ordnance by raising awareness and encouraging behaviour

change among affected communities, so that economic and social development can occur. In simple terms, it teaches people how to recognise, avoid and manage the risks posed by mines and unexploded ordnance.

Another pillar is weapons and stockpile management and destruction. Stockpiled landmines far outnumber those actually laid in the ground. The *Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention* states that countries must destroy their stockpiled mines within four years of signing the convention.

Then there is advocacy. The UN advocates for universal participation in existing international agreements that ban or limit the use of landmines.

The first of these agreements, is the ban on antipersonnel mines, the *Ottawa Treaty*, of 1997. This was followed by further international agreements, such as the *Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM)* or *Oslo Treaty*.

The final fundamentally important pillar – and the one upon which Revive is predicated, is assistance to victims.

It is obligatory for signatories to the *Ottawa Treaty* to provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration, of mine victims.

There is a prescribed set of victim assistance actions designed to address immediate and long-term needs of mine and explosive weapon victims, their families, mine-affected communities and people with disabilities. Information management

These actions start with emergency and continuing medical care; physical rehabilitation; psychosocial support and social inclusion; and economic reintegration.

Monitoring and evaluation of victim support require effective information management systems. Hundreds of thousands of people affected by mines and explosive remnants exist in over 70 countries. The actual figure is unknown, and may be far greater, as many mine victims never reach medical centres.

Providing adequate and appropriate support to victims of explosive violence is hugely important, but so is empowering them to take control of their own rehabilitation. In Iraq, the Barsa Prosthetics Project trains victims of landmines to make prosthetics. Other schemes are looking to train local people in trauma care and medicine.

One of the major gaps – particularly in the Middle East – is provision of psychological care. There are not enough native psychiatrists, and this is one area in which importing foreign psychologists does not work.

This is an issue that Revive will be focussing on later in the year, when an exhibition of paintings by Syrian refugee children will be displayed in Parliament and a group of Members of Parliament, Peers and journalists will be visiting the Sir Bobby Charlton Rehabilitation Centre in Amman in Jordan later this year.

## Author



**NIGEL ELLWAY** is a former international journalist and Whitehall

media advisor who created the APPG on Explosive Weapons in 2015. He now works with humanitarian de-mining and counter IED organisations to facilitate political awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding these disciplines. Revive and the APPG would like to sincerely thank Bridge Insurance Brokers for their generous financial support in setting up the campaign, and Giles Duley for the use of his photos in this article. To get involved visit: [revivecampaign.com](http://revivecampaign.com)

*There are hundreds of thousands of people affected by mines and explosive remnants in over 70 countries. The actual figure is unknown, and may be far greater, as many mine victims never reach medical centres. Providing adequate and appropriate support to these victims is hugely important, but so is empowering them to take control of their own rehabilitation*

Giles Duley

