

SURVIVING LANDMINES

Personal accounts of child Bosnian landmine survivors



Jesuit Refugee Service

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Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and plead the cause of refugees and forcibly displaced people. Set up by the Society of Jesus in 1980 and now at work in over 50 countries, the priority of JRS is to accompany refugees whose needs are more urgent or forgotten.

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A Message of solidarity from the Youth Ambassador of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines

To my friends in Eastern Europe,

When I heard your stories I remembered my story. At first, I wanted to cry again. I remembered wanting my leg back, I wanted to be just like everybody else, too. I wanted to run and play freely in the fields. I wanted to go to school without everybody looking at me. I still want to shout at the people who made the mines and sold the mines and planted the mines in our beautiful fields where the butterflies and flowers live! And I want you to keep shouting for a universal ban on landmines.

But I was also very glad when I read your stories. I am so happy to hear that you continued to study and that you are doing many interesting things with your lives, that one of you received a gold medal for sport.

Although I am the Youth Ambassador for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, I am still in Grade 11, because after the war it was difficult to go to school and many of us spent three years in the first class. I used to be shy and ashamed but now, like you, I want to do something to make the world a better place for people.

When I was 12, I went to the United Nations in Vienna and asked them to ban landmines. They did that in Ottawa in 1997 and I celebrated there, and also in Oslo when I saw Jody Williams and Tun Channareth receive the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

There is still much to do to implement this Treaty, to clear the mines from countries like Bosnia, Cambodia, Angola, Afghanistan and Iraq. In Nairobi, Kenya, at the first Review Conference of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, from 29 November to 3 December 2004, a new action plan for assistance to mine affected countries for five years will be adopted.



Many people victimized by the mines have no house, no water close to their homes, no jobs, no opportunity for their children to go to school, no affordable health care. We need to campaign for their rights, especially the rights of the poorest ones.

I have a little plan to help us “ban the landmines in our hearts”:

- to help people affected by war and mines;
- to do one thing everyday to make peace grow like our lotus flowers;
- to spend 5 minutes reflecting peacefully everyday;
- to try to solve conflict without violence; and
- to care for the environment (especially not to put mines in the fields).

Can you, story tellers and readers, promise at least one of these?

Dear readers, I ask you to listen to these stories with your hearts, to listen to the pain and the courage, the weakness and the strength, the tears and the joy, the despair and the enthusiasm and know that you too can turn war into peace and hate into love. Dear story-tellers, may your dreams come true!

With much love,

*Song Kosal, Youth Ambassador,
International Campaign
to Ban Landmines*



On the left Song Kosal as an 11 year old girl, 1994

Song Kosal in 2003



Introduction

Many thousands of children were injured and killed by landmine explosions in the war that tore Bosnia apart between 1992 and 1995.

We still call them 'children'. When they were injured, all were younger than 18. The youngest was three months; he lost his leg when his mother, who was carrying him, stepped on a landmine and was killed.

Now many have finished secondary school, and others are older than we are. But after almost four years into the JRS Mine Victims Assistance Project (MVAP), we just call them 'our children'.

An easy trap to fall into would be to look for answers to the inevitable questions. Why did this happen to the children? Why have their lives been marked by so deep a wound, not only of body, but also of the soul? Why were their childhoods interrupted so roughly and so early on?

The answers do not exist and it is useless to search for them. Instead, we decided to ask the children to share some of the strength that has helped them get through the dark days, and enabled them to look with hope to the future; strength they possess of which they were possibly unaware.

This collection of stories is a testimony to the landmine survivors which whom we work and we publish the book firstly as a tribute to them. We want to let each of them know that their lives, and what they have to say about it, are precious to us. And we thank them for all the changes they have wrought in our lives as we have tried to support them.

We hope the book will help people, especially children, who have not recovered after suffering the trauma of landmine incidents. Let other children and young people, who have somehow managed to rebuild their lives, teach them how to live again, and show them why it is worthwhile trying.



And let this book be a way of thanking all whose support and money make our service possible: foundations like RENOVABIS, Caritas Austria, Caritas Italiana, and people from different countries around Europe.

We also take the opportunity to thank the people directly involved in the MVAP at some time or another in Bosnia – especially the two previous directors, Pierre Girardier and Eugene Quinn – and JRS staff from Zagreb and Belgrade, as well as all our workers and volunteers.

We thank the personnel of orthopaedic and rehabilitation facilities, hospitals and welfare centres with which we work.

We thank ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), and the local Red Cross, LSN (Landmine Survivors Network), Merhamet, HI (Handicap International) and SFOR (Stabilisation Forces) for their co-operation and support.

Let each of us learn from the children and hope such things never happen to anyone again.

Przemek Miozga
JRS Bosnia Landmines Project Director (2000-2002)



Personal accounts of child Bosnian landmine survivors



JRS set up projects in Bosnia in the aftermath of the war. Like in so many other countries in Africa, Asia and southeast Europe, assistance to landmine survivors is an integral part of its work.

What we want is an ordinary life

We were forced to leave our village, Kucic Kula, Zvornik, at the beginning of the war. I was 10 at the time and I lived with my parents and two brothers. On 16 February 1992, in Bjeli Potok, they took away my father, brothers, grandfather and other members of my family. Everything was so fast and so sudden. What I can remember is that one morning they surrounded us and took us to the road, where there were already many people from other places. When they had us all there, enemy soldiers came in big military trucks and separated the men aged between 16 and 80 from the women and children. I never saw my father again, he is still 'missing'.

They took us in trucks to different locations, unknown to me at the time. The children and women were taken to Dubrave, a military barracks, and our fathers and other relatives were taken somewhere else, but we did not know where. When we arrived at the barracks, people started to say that we would only be there for a few days, and that we were there for questioning. It was in Dubrave that the landmine accident occurred.

As any 10-year-old kid would, I wanted to play and have fun. One day, on 14 July 1992, I went to play football with my friends. The place we chose was not marked as a minefield. We kicked the ball out of our field and I ran to fetch it. On the way back, I stepped on a landmine and lost my right foot. All my friends ran away, and I called for help.

There was nobody around, so I crawled on my knees until I met a man who carried me to the first car we passed on the road. My mother was nearby, she ran up and gave me first aid; she used her shirt to bandage my leg. We went to hospital, and I was sent to Tuzla for an operation. Eventually, they amputated my leg below the knee and now I use a prosthesis.

After the accident, I realised I had to be very strong. I was the eldest and my mother and two younger brothers needed me. I kept a smile on my face and a positive way of thinking, which helped



those around me as well as myself. I continued going to school, and got on with my life in Tuzla, where I settled with my family.

Now I am in fourth class at the electro-engineering school and a very good student. When I finish school I will continue studying. Life today is really difficult, especially for those who have not finished school, and there are many people who have not. With the help of my professor, I go step by step towards my future.

After the incident, I did not have any problems with my friends. Many do not even know I have an artificial limb, because I walk well and I am interested in sport. When we decide to play football or basketball, they never ask 'is this okay for you?' or 'are you able to play with us?' We just play. Now I also play wheelchair volleyball and do athletics for people with disabilities.

What I want, together with others like me, is to have an ordinary life. We want to have families, to be respected and to make our contribution. Let the motto of people with disabilities always be: I want to do it and I can do it.

Nermin Tahic



I can do everything others do

When I was eight, I stepped on a landmine and lost my leg. I do not like to remember the event, but I have decided to share my sad life story with you.

I remember a beautiful spring morning. Sunday. No school and I was so bored. I wanted to go somewhere to forget the next five school days, until it was time for the weekend again, for fun and a break. What sprang to mind was a big meadow with flowers and butterflies. My cousin, three-year-old Lejla, came to visit. I tried to have fun with her, but that meadow was drawing me with its beauty. I could not resist. I had to persuade my father to take me to any meadow. I succeeded.

It was already 5pm and my family was going on a short trip. My grandmother and Lejla came with us. As we approached our destination, my heart was beating faster and faster. Everyone was excited but I was the most excited. Finally we arrived. I was in peace, grateful to my father for bringing me here. I was very happy. But all good things come to an end. When it was time to go home, my father walked first, then me, Lejla, mother and grandmother. Lejla and I were holding hands as we walked.

Suddenly, there was a loud bang . There was smoke all around me. I heard my father say: “What have I done, why did I listen to her?” Then I felt something hot sliding down my leg. I looked down, I saw blood and I had no shoe on my foot. I bent down to see better and I realised my heel was hanging by a thread. I couldn't believe this was happening to me.

Today I ask myself how I didn't cry, how I was so brave. Perhaps I did not feel pain because of my fear. Only after a while did I notice Lejla's leg was also bleeding. Lejla and I only looked at each other. The silence said it all.

At last we reached the hospital. The last thing I remember was a dark hall and the doctor. The following day, everything was different. I looked under the bedcover. My leg was no longer there.



Why did I go to that stupid meadow? What did I do that was so bad that God punished me in this way? How would I walk? Many questions passed through my mind, and all I wanted was to go back in time and to repair the mistake. Then, someone called my name. It was Lejla. She did not know what to say when I asked her how she was and what had happened to her leg.

When my mother and father arrived, at first I was silent and then I asked: "Will my leg grow again?" My mother started to cry. Those days were so difficult. Everyday felt as long as a year. I was very depressed. I didn't talk; I only wanted to go home. I spent about three months in hospital.

Then the day came: I was afraid of the reactions of my friends. How would they take the fact that now I was not like them? They would all look at me, ask what happened, and I did not want that. I knew what kind of life was waiting for me, I knew my leg would not grow back, but a small part of my heart hoped for something better.

Today my prayers have been answered to some extent. I am 12 now, and I have a leg, or rather prosthesis, and I can do everything other children do. I thank God it was only my leg. When I see others who were very badly injured, it makes my heart calmer.

Selma Guso



Selma
playing the
guitar with
her father



Getting gold for my country

I thought it was thunder at first. But it was sunny day. I couldn't move; I knew what had happened, I had stepped on a mine in a field near our house. We live in a place called Devetak; we had built a house and moved there from Tuzla nine months before the war, in 1991. We had to leave when the war started, moving from place to place. When the fighting was over, we returned to our devastated home.

In 1997, I had the accident. My uncle approached me first, but he did not dare come too close because of the mines. Seconds later, my twin brother Armin came. He took the laces from his running shoes and tied them under my wounded legs and arms. My uncle and neighbours helped take me first to an ambulance in nearby Lukavac, and from there to a hospital in Tuzla, where I was operated on that same night.

The following morning, my father and doctor told me the worst news of my life; my right leg had been amputated under the knee, there was blood in my lung, my left arm was fixed with metal plates, and my left leg was badly wounded. At that moment I wished I had never woken up from the operation. My father and doctor could not console me. I cried and cried until they gave me medicine to sleep.

Ten days later, I had another operation. I spent all my time lying in bed because I had suffered seventeen different injuries. The third operation was plastic surgery, cutting skin from healthy areas and grafting it onto wounds that refused to heal.

After that operation, I went home. Two months later, the plates were removed from my arms, and I started therapy. The post-operative period between May 1997 and January 1998 was the most difficult, because my brother was attending school and I could not go. I even thought I would never go to school again, because I was too shy to be among people when I did not have a leg and was covered with scars.



I got my first prosthesis in December 1997. My first step was the happiest moment of my life. I cried, this time from happiness. I wished to run, to play football, basketball and do everything that I had missed during the previous seven months. My teacher persuaded me to return to school for the second term. I soon caught up on what I had missed and continued my education normally.

In June the following year, with the support of JRS I went to Italy for an operation to restore at least some of the use of my left arm. The operation was a success and after that JRS donated a prosthesis so I could walk for the first time without crutches. I had my fifth operation in November 2001, to shorten the bone on my limb because it was troubling me when I walked.

In 2000, I finished school with very good marks. Meantime, I started wheelchair volleyball training with the Sons of Bosnia club in Lukavac. Today I am 20, a member of the national wheelchair volleyball team. In September 2001, we won the gold medal in the European championship. My ambition is to win the world championship next year, to get gold for my country.

I do not feel disabled, I live a normal life and easily adapt to new surroundings. I plan to find a job, to get married and to make a living from my work. Losing one part of your body does not mean all is lost. On the contrary, it should act as a motivation and strength for you to make your dreams come true.

I would like to thank my parents, my sister Adila, my brother Armin, and the doctors, teachers, relatives, players, coaches, JRS workers and all those who were with me when I was having a hard time.

Ermin Jusufovic





**Ermin
Jusufovic
on the left**



**Nedzad
Sakinovic**



Keep struggling for your life

I was born on 1 January 1977 in the village of Kudice. I am a farmer by profession. I live with my parents and four brothers. My two sisters are married and live with their families: one in the United States, the other here in Bosnia.

I was injured in my village on 24 December 1993, while collecting firewood in the forest to help people in my neighbourhood. I stood on a landmine and lost both legs. The day I was injured is one that I would really like to forget. However, on the other hand, when I look at the world around me, I am happy that I survived and can help my parents, who suffered so much during the war. Life in our village is not easy, but I cope, with support from my family, and organisations like JRS.

My plans for the future? I wish the Bosnian State would start creating work opportunities for people with disabilities, so I can earn a more stable income and manage my flock and field a little better. If not, I will be forced to leave my country to try to start again across the ocean. Then I could think about the future, about having my own family and a normal life.

A piece of advice for those who have had a mine accident: do not think that what happened to you was merely a single bad event. Perhaps it was your fate. Keep struggling for your life and do not let people make you feel useless. Your life is in your hands alone.

Nedžad Sakinovic



Let it never happen to anybody again

When war broke out in 1992, I should have been starting my first year in school, but it wasn't possible. At the time, I was living in Hladilije, near Gorazde; then in 1993 we fled. That same year, they opened the schools again and I completed the first class. In 1994, I started the second year, but it only lasted one day for me; on the second day of the new school year, I was hit by bad luck.

I was playing with my cousin and sister in the garden, and I decided to climb the apple tree. My first step towards it was fatal. I stepped on a landmine and activated it. We were close to home; my father immediately ran out and carried me in his arms to hospital. I spent two and a half months there. It was a very difficult time for me, and I questioned whether I would ever be able to walk again and when this war would end. Eventually, I was moved to a hospital in Sarajevo, because I still needed medical care.

Today, I am 16 years old, and I am in the eighth class at the primary school of Malta in Sarajevo. I never had any problems with my friends, they accepted me. I wish that what happened to me will never happen to them or any other child.

Adnan Bajramovic



We have to keep going

I live alone with my mother because my father and brother were killed during the war and my two sisters are married. I am completely disabled.

I was born on 26 December 1977 in Todorovo, in Velika Kladusa municipality. On 4 June 1994, I went to the forest looking for mushrooms. There I activated a mine. The explosion hurled me away and I fell on another landmine, losing my right hand and eye. I thought I would die. When I came round, I stopped the bleeding by using pieces of my trousers. Then I crawled for five hundred metres to the nearest house, from where I was driven to hospital.

I was hospitalised in Karlovac in Croatia and all the time I thought of coming back to Bosnia. The first few months following my return were not easy because it was hard for me to be dependent on my mother. Within a short time, I got married, but that did not last long. Now I keep bees and sheep, as well as some fruit and flowers. I plan to get more and hope it will be enough for me to live.

To everybody with a disability, I would say that it is true that our lives will never be the same again. They are more complicated now, but we have to keep going for ourselves and for our families.

Elvin Hozdic



We ordinary people never wanted this war

I am lucky; I still live in the same place that I lived in before the war. I finished secondary school in 1994, and the landmine incident took place on 21 June 1996. As is always the case with bad luck, it was unexpected and sudden. My neighbours and some other people who heard the blast ran to my side and took me to hospital. The explosion changed my life forever.



I never, even at the beginning, had any problems with my friends. At the time, I was still shocked and I did not think about the future at all. A long time passed before I could do so. Now I think that I see my future as most young people in this country do: I just want a “normal” life and a job.

Like other people, with or without a disability, I never wished for anything other than to live a normal life with everybody else in my country. We ‘ordinary people’ never wanted the war and all it brought and still brings. Young people should learn from this and struggle to ensure it never happens again.

Aleksandra Dilit



Life can only get better

I am 22, and trying to complete secondary school, which I could not do before because of the war. I live in a village close to Travnik, where I was born and where I have always lived.

I had a mine accident in April 1996, losing my leg when a friend and I took a shortcut, not knowing it was mined. We were returning home from a meadow. Almir, another friend of mine, was cutting wood nearby, and he rushed to help me. He took me from the minefield and drove me to hospital in Travnik.

I remember that in spite of everything, I was still thinking positively, that life could only get better after this. Right after the operation, I was unable to return to school because I had to wait to be fitted with a prosthesis. My friends accepted me and were full of compassion for what had happened.

About my future, I think only in terms of finding a suitable job, so I will be able to start to live like others do, and to have my own family.

My message to young people is to be careful and stay far away from minefields.

Hasib Puzic



Think about the better life to come

My life is as the good Lord decided to make it. I was born in March 1984 in Velika Kladusa. My parents tell me I didn't have any health problems as a child. This is how it was until the day my whole life changed, when a landmine explosion left me without one of my legs, while the other was seriously injured.

I spent a long time in hospital in Bihac, and was sent to Germany twice. I had 11 operations during this time, and during one of them my leg was amputated. It was even harder for me, because my younger brother, Faruk, and my sister Semska were also injured in the accident. Faruk was seriously injured: although they did not amputate his leg, the nerves are dead and his foot is limp. He is 70 per cent disabled.

Such is life and in spite of everything, it goes on. My health is now good; I do not have any medical problems. I walk five or six kilometres daily to secondary school. My prosthesis doesn't bother me. I don't wonder how I will make friends, because they are always around me. Their support stops me from feeling depressed. I live with my parents, brother and sister. We live simply. I manage to help my family in their daily work.

Don't think about the past, about the most difficult days of your life, is my advice to everybody, especially to young people like me, and to those who have had an accident like mine. Instead think about a better life to come. Being with friends and looking for a job, will keep negative thoughts away.

Aldin Sakinovic

Aldin with his younger brother Faruk



Living and dying with hope

The worst day of my life was 24 July 1996. I was in Vrbovik, helping my best friend clean the ruins of his house when I stepped on a landmine and lost my left leg. I was 16. My friend was the first to help me and then an ambulance arrived and took me to hospital.

After the event – in spite of all the tragedy – I was still thinking positively about my future and myself. I was pretty young and not at all aware of the consequences of what had happened, I just wanted to get on with my life.

After a month in hospital, I returned to school to try to go on as though nothing had happened. I needed time to find my place among friends. With their support I found it. I was determined to do so and I did.

Now, life is much easier, although it is sometimes hard to keep up with my friends. After all that has happened, I am still optimistic about the future. I would like to spend the rest of my life with the girl with whom I am with at the moment. In 1998, I finished electro-technical school. I wanted to continue my education but I did not have the money for that. I am unemployed and would like to find a job; it is very difficult to do so. But a man in Bosnia lives and dies with hope.

I want to tell all those who have lost a part of their body, as I did, that they should not give up. Leading a “normal” life is possible as a landmine survivor if you are strong willed. And for the rest: make love, not war.

Mirnes Sirotanovic



We have to continue to live and struggle

On 31 March 1996, I decided to visit my hometown. I was 12. I was forbidden from going, but it was destiny. My original home was in the suburbs of Dobo, but we had to leave in 1993. As displaced people, my family moved several times.

When I arrived at the International Forces (IFOR) military base, I was told that my father was working in a field nearby. I thought I would surprise him, which I did, but I regretted it later. My father was shocked when he saw me, because he knew where I was standing.

Then I felt the heat and fell. Everything passed through my head: I knew what I had done and what awaited me. My father took me to the IFOR base, where they bandaged my leg and took me by helicopter to the military hospital, where I was operated on. I spent 12 days there.

I missed out on a good deal of school when I had the accident so I had to repeat one year. It was then that I decided to be better than those who have both legs. Many don't even know that I have a disability, only my closest friends do. Even the sports teacher in the first year of secondary school did not know it, because I did not want to be different from my school friends.

After the accident, my plans for the future slowly changed. I used to dream of becoming a professional driver, but I didn't meet the entry requirements for that school because of the medical test.

I started to think more about my future. How could I earn an income during this difficult time? How could I find a job? How could I afford a prosthesis? I had no great desire to do so, but I went to the car mechanic school. At first, it was not easy but now practicing and learning is even becoming a way of relaxing for me. Now I am in my second year, trying to master my fear of working alone, without a teacher or a supervisor.



After all this, I am aware that I must think about my future, how to be independent, how not to rely on my parents forever. I think that I am a persistent person and anyway now there is no time to complain: we have to continue to live and struggle.

Mines are perfidious killers that make no distinction between soldiers in war and civilians in peacetime. Do not look for them, they only destroy life. They can change your opinion of the world and of yourself.

Malic Bradaric



Unable to play in any sports club

I often go to watch football games played by junior teams in our team stadium. The boys are roughly my age. I like all kinds of sport, but most of all football. The thing I want most in my life is to play football, but I am unable to play in any sports club. Yes, it is my unfulfilled dream, and all because of an unexploded object that I held in my hands.

I found the bomb in January 1995, when I was 11. I was returning from visiting my grandmother who lived a few streets away from our house. We lived in Bihac, I took a shortcut, and there I saw it. I knew it was a kind of weapon, but I thought it was safe to play with. So I took it to find out what it was.

When I returned home, I let my mum know I was in, took a hammer and went to the balcony on the second floor. Without thinking, I hit the 'thing' with a hammer. And then it exploded. Our house was shaken by the blast. My younger brother – who was seven – saw me covered in blood and started to cry.

Neighbours looked but were too afraid to approach me and take me down from the balcony. My grandfather ran up and took me to the first floor. They dressed my leg and arm and took me to the main road. They walked, carrying me, until they came across a car; there were very few cars because of the war. First, we drove to the hospital in Vojnic, then to the one in Glini, and finally to the one in Banja Luka.

The time that I spent in hospital was long and hard. In Banja Luka, I was covered in bandages from head to toe. I spent two months there, the most painful months of my life. It was the first time that I had been separated from my family, nobody could visit me. I had several difficult operations, performed by a doctor from Kladusa. He was very nice to me. He promised to do his best to help me. If I had stayed in either of the first two hospitals that I went to, in Vojnic or Glini, I would have lost my leg, because it was shattered.



Time passed very slowly in hospital and I missed my home so much. When they finally let me go back, my rehabilitation was not yet over. My mother and the rest of my family helped me a great deal. My father wasn't there; he was working in Croatia, as he had been for the previous 18 years.

He only found out about the accident when he returned after the war. It was good that my father came because my mother could not take it anymore and needed help. He supported me a lot and thanks to both my parents, I managed to resume a so-called "normal life". I had two more operations in Bihac.

Now, thank God, my life is good. It is like this because I am strong willed. My friends treat me as any other child of my age; they do not focus on what they see: the marks on my body of what happened to me. I have lost all five fingers on my left hand, I cannot see with my right eye and my right foot was badly hurt.

I live in Velika Kladusa, with my parents and younger brother. I spend my free time with my family. And from time to time – depending on my health – I play sport. I attend secondary school and am still thinking of what I want to do next. I would like to study, maybe trade management, but I will not have the money for this. I hope the economic situation in Bosnia improves and I have the opportunity to study outside my canton.

I would like to recommend to those who were injured in this war not to give up, to accept help from others, because in them there is hope for a better life. And I want to warn all children not to play with suspicious objects. There are still many in Bosnia and they can inflict serious harm, which will scar you for life.

Zemir Dogic





De-mining
operation
in urban
Bosnia



Timka
Abdic



There is still good in the world

I am a Civil War Victim. My family gives me all the support I need; there is my mother, my elder sister, who is 23, and my younger brother, aged seven. I am 19. My father died in May 1994. We live in Cazin, but I was born in Bihac.

My mother was a victim of the same landmine accident as I was, in Japic Brdo in 1995. I lost half my left foot and the main artery under my right knee was seriously injured.

I used different kinds of prostheses for four years, but only when one was made for me, did I feel this prosthesis really suited my foot.

I finished secondary school in 2000 without any problems. Then I attended a sales and computer course. In the future, I plan to find a job and take care of my health a little more than I do now.

If I have one thing that I would like to say to others, it is that I hope that all those injured by war become reconciled with what happened, because this is the most important step towards their future. If they accept this, they will happily be able to get on with their lives, and not think that they are the only ones cursed with bad luck. There is still good in the world.

I would tell them: stay with your friends as much as you can and don't stay at home alone, and you will forget about your pain and problems. Just be happy. And to other people, I would like to ask for your support for people with disabilities.

Lots of luck, health and love for the future... take care.

Timka Abdic



A test and a lesson about how to live

Because of the pain I am not certain who ran to my assistance right after the explosion, but I am almost sure it was my father. We were in Srebrenica, where we lived before the war, when I had the accident; I was nine. My father died a couple of months later in this damned war.

I fell into a deep depression and became very afraid of people. At the time my family and friends did not accept this very well, but things are much better now. At the moment I am living in Sarajevo, where I am attending first year in secondary school.

At 17, it is much easier for me to find friends, because I do not fear people any longer and I am ready to give them a part of myself. People have often asked me if I think about the future and I must confess that when I do, I am a little scared. My life has taught me to take each day as if it was my last, and I really do this. I have learned not to make plans, because only God knows what will happen today, tomorrow and in the coming years. Now I live through my relationships with friends, giving my love. Here is one important message: love people and they will love you.

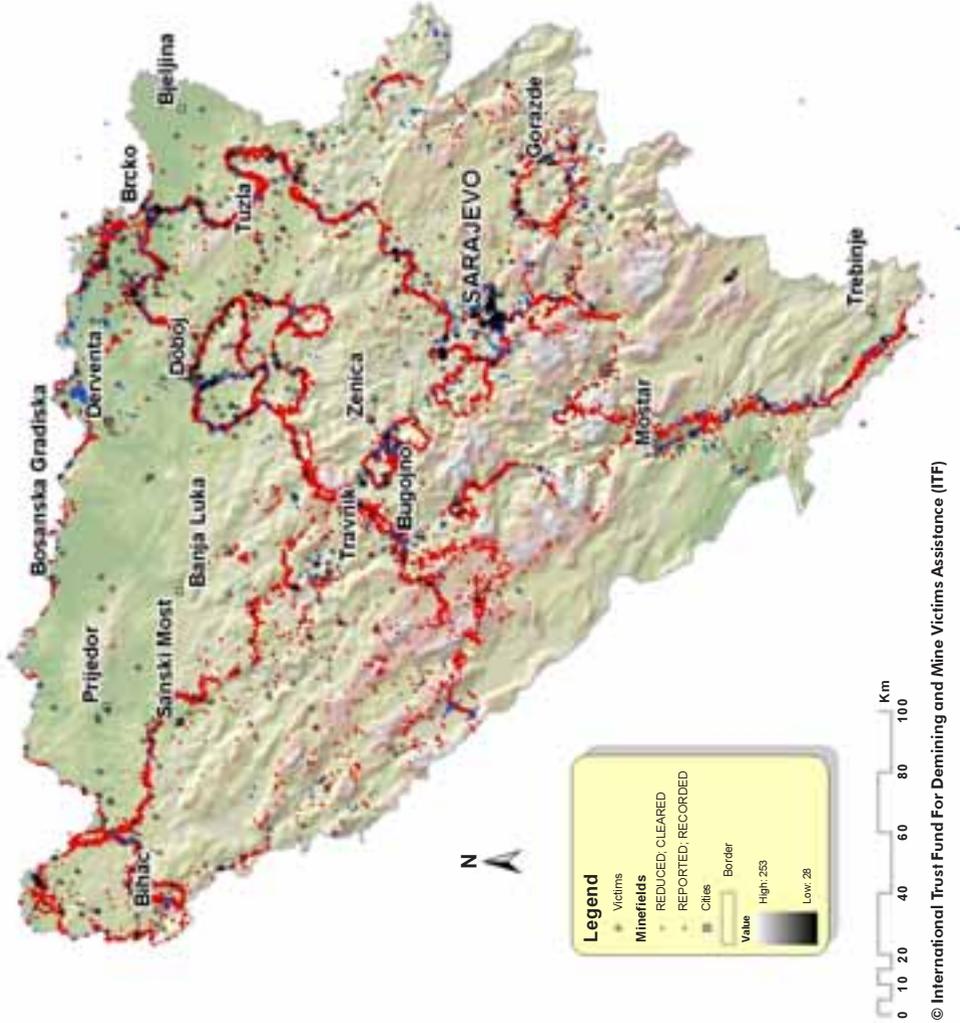
And finally, to all those who have lost hope in life: everything that has happened to you is not a tragedy, it is not a punishment. It is a test and a lesson about how to live.

Alma Halilovic



Appendices

MINE SITUATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA





Is it not time for all governments to exercise their sovereignty responsibly by permitting international scrutiny and action, if persons, with or without state approval, within state borders are using landmines?

Frank Brennan SJ



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