

Speech: Importance of International Mine Awareness Day: Article by Tom Burn

It's over 20 years since Princess Diana walked through a heavily mined field in Angola, and changed the way the international community thought about this appalling and indiscriminate weapon of war. Shortly after that historic visit, the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction was signed, creating an established framework through which the world could work towards eradicating these barbaric weapons.

Mines and unexploded ordnance leave a terrible legacy of war, long after the guns have fallen silent. Hidden from sight, they continue to kill and maim innocent civilians going about their daily lives. Their very presence hinders development and prevents families and communities from being able to return to their land and rebuild.

Sri Lanka is no stranger to the long-lasting suffering that mines cause. In fact, by the end of the conflict, over 500km² of land was contaminated by landmines. Today marks the International Day for Mine Awareness, the first one since Sri Lanka acceded to the Ottawa Convention in December 2017. Signing up to the Ottawa Protocol demonstrated the government's commitment to meeting its ambitious target of becoming Mine Impact Free by 2020.

The UK supports Sri Lanka in its efforts to clear every single mine on this beautiful island. That's why the British High Commission in Colombo has been funding demining work in Sri Lanka since 2010. Between 2010 and 2019, we will have spent over £6.2 million (LKR 1.2 billion) on demining all across the North and East of Sri Lanka. Working mostly through our partners, The HALO Trust, our goal is to clear more than 600,000m² of land between 2016 and 2019, making it safe for people to move home and start cultivating their land again. Together with a range of Sri Lankan and international partners, we are making progress. Last year, we joined celebrations to mark the milestone of Batticaloa becoming the first District in Sri Lanka to be classified as mine "residual risk" free. Many organisations helped to ensure this significant result. We are proud that another British Demining charity, the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), working alongside the Humanitarian Demining Unit of the Sri Lankan Army and others, made a major contribution to achieving this great feat.

In the last year, UK support helped clear 142,549m² of land of mines, unexploded ordnance and stray and small ammunition; our clearance activity has benefited 5,215 people; a further 11,139 individuals, including women and children, have received UK supported mine risk education.

That's what makes demining such an important part of the UK's wider commitment to reconciliation and peace-building in Sri Lanka. Not only does

it offer immediate humanitarian benefits, but it also accelerates recovery from conflict. Families can live and farm. Children can play without fear. In the short term, it also offers employment opportunities to some of the most vulnerable, including female heads of household. The HALO Trust for instance has a workforce that is over 50 percent female, helping young women affected by the conflict to make a real difference in the future of their communities.

Last year our Minister for Asia, the Rt Hon Mark Field MP, visited the North to hear from those working on the frontlines of the demining effort. I too visited last November, seeing for myself the scale of the challenge. With anti-personnel mines still covering the ground in great numbers, the risk is still very real, though significant progress has been made. The Halo Trust's thorough and professional clearance operations mean that land can be handed back to those displaced many years ago. I met one family who had already begun rebuilding their lives in their old home. With new crops planted and a sense of optimism about the future, meeting them was a great reminder of exactly why this sort of work is so important.

Since 2010, much has been accomplished, and together we have dug many thousands of mines and unexploded ordnances from the ground. Thousands of mines that can no longer threaten the lives of ordinary Sri Lankans. Whilst we should take pride in this shared achievement, there is still much more work to be done. On International Mine Awareness Day, let's redouble our efforts to realise the dream of a mine-free Sri Lanka by 2020.

[News story: Army officer helps Zambia set up health care education programme](#)

Ten years ago, senior nurse Chris Carter took a risk which would prove to be life changing. Leaving a job that he loved in the NHS for a leap in the dark – a career with the British Army. It was a choice that not only changed his life, but arguably it also changed the lives of many Zambians critically in need of nursing care.

Because his decision not only led to a new job, it also indirectly opened the door to a new and unexpected adventure when, rich in operational experience, he later answered a call for volunteers to go to Zambia to teach critical care.

A rewarding experience in the making. But he wasn't expecting to end up heading a team which would be collaborating internationally and leading a program which would have a national impact on the future health care set up in a sub Saharan Commonwealth country.

Major Chris Carter gets ready for a lesson in a Zambian hospital

A new job a new life

It all started with that choice he made at the crossroads of his caring career. He said :

At the time it was at the height of the Afghanistan and Iraq campaigns, and I was looking for a new opportunity,

I'd always wanted to work internationally, and I'd always had the aspiration to work in a combat zone. Another aspiration was to test myself in a developing country and I knew the Army could offer me all that. I felt, if I don't do this now, I never will.

A decade after taking that decision, Chris, 39, is now a Major in the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps, and all of those aspirations have been answered, and more.

Today he is a critical care nurse and a nurse lecturer working in the Defence School of health-care education, a military unit embedded in Birmingham City University. There he heads up a team responsible for training the Armed Forces future student nurses. He has a tour of duty of Afghanistan tucked under his Sam Browne belt, as well as other deployments to the Middle East.

For many that would be more than enough to keep them occupied. But the urge to serve is strong in Major Chris Carter. Which is why in 2015 he answered an ad in a medical journal for volunteers to set up a critical nursing care program in sub Saharan Africa. And so, his intense relationship with the Commonwealth country of Zambia began.

Looking at the list of skills and life experience that the job called for, it was clear that Chris had just what the doctor ordered. And as far as he is concerned it's his career in the Army that he has to thank for that. He said:

In the Army, it's not that they give you opportunities as such, they are available, and if you seek them out, and work hard for them, then you can get there.

Nursing in Zambia

Zambia is a stable land locked, low income country with 60 per cent of the population living in rural communities. Yet whilst it is poor, Zambia is training its doctors and anaesthetists, helped by international investment in terms of money and resources.

But it soon became clear that more was needed. Hence the advert. Major Carter said :

The Drs there realised that their project to develop health care

was not going to reach its full potential unless investment was also being made in nursing staff,

The doctors were being trained in current practice, applied in the context of a developing country, dealing with diseases totally different to what we see in the UK, but which are common there. But without the nurses who do the majority of the care, the project wouldn't work.

Initially the task facing Chris was to visit Zambia's main hospital and help them to identify what they needed and to develop their framework for developing their nursing staff.

No funding? No project? No problem!

But before he could do that, another little problem lay before him. He said:

What transpired was that, despite what the advert said, in fact there was no project, no funding – nothing.

Undeterred, Chris and a small core of volunteers from the UK kept calm and carried on. He said:

Given my background, my contacts and my operational experience linked with my role in nursing education I convinced The Tropical Health and Education trust, a UK NGO, to fund me for a two week needs assessment.

Since then Chris has been to Zambia seven times, staying for periods of two to four weeks. He said:

In 2016 we worked with the Zambian Ministry of Health. We went to 16 public hospitals which meant a round trip of 4,980 kms in a Land Cruiser. There isn't a bit of the country, off road or on tarmac that I haven't seen.

On this epic trip he asked at each hospital, 'What critical care can you realistically provide in your hospital? What are the challenges you face, and how are your nurses being employed? And that was the first time that they had had that snapshot of what was going on.

Gathering all that information, Chris and the team then wrote a report for the Ministry of Health. In it they recommended what they could do as a project team to help build the country's capacity in nursing capability.

From this, what the Zambians identified as essential was a graduate nursing programme.

Zambian nurses in training

Major Carter said:

What tends to happen is that a lot of money is spent on educating Drs, and while nurses might get the odd short course, which is valuable, what is needed is a structured framework which can contribute to the long-term career development of an individual.

Get that right and it means you have a reliable capability, you prevent people from getting demotivated because they don't feel valued, and for places like Zambia, it stops the haemorrhaging of talented nurses who go to work in neighbouring countries who can pay more.

Armed with this information Chris went into battle attracting funding from DFID, the EU and from Birmingham university, who also provide him with all the professional back office functions and governance needed to keep such a project running.

Zambian priorities

From nothing, Chris has built up the team which has grown from just four enthusiasts into a truly international collaboration. Working closely with the Lusaka College of Nursing, the Zambian union of nursing organisations, the Ministry of Health and the General nursing council, Chris makes sure that whatever his team delivers, it is in accordance with the Zambian's own priorities, but with his guidance, in the context of the UN's sustainable development goals such as providing universal access to health care and building a framework for quality, lifelong learning. He said:

We are helping them to build up a critical mass of trained nurses, helping to develop a graduate cadre and in turn future leaders, future researchers, future educators. We're building a framework for life.

And this must all be done in an atmosphere of cultural sensitivity, another skill which Chris picked up from his time in Afghanistan. He said:

We have to be aware that our way of doing something may not be the best way for them. It is all about helping them to find their own solutions.

Take the basic practicalities as an example of what he means by that. In a country which has 73 regional dialects, how are you going to provide a universal training package?

When the majority of the population live in remote villages, how would someone get health care if they had a ruptured appendix, or if they had broken their leg, or had an obstructed child birth, at night – how would you get them to a hospital which is two hours away, at night along a road which has no lighting.

It's easy to see that sensible solutions to health care provision must be seen in this harsh context.

Such has been the success of the project, 900 health care workers have been trained since 2015, that the Army is keen to explore the benefits for the UK Armed Forces. Last year Chris took six students from the Defence School of Health, one from the navy, the rest Army, to Zambia as part of their training.

Benefits for training UK Armed Forces nurses

Not only do they get to see the treatment of diseases such as TB and malaria, which while rare in the UK, in their careers they will have to know about, but perhaps more importantly the pressures of practicing in a resource limited environment. Major Carter said:

We watched a Dr performing a procedure and I talk the students through it. I tell them to watch how he and the nurses were working – only opening equipment when they needed it, so they don't waste anything – because it's too precious.

I challenge them... imagine you are on board a ship, or in the field. You're not going to have an infinite supply of gloves, oxygen, swabs... when you've got 10 patients on a ward, and there's only three of you, there's no agency you can call, no extra staff, it's just you.

Thinking differently

Chris uses the experience to get the students thinking in a different way. A way which might just make a difference when on the battlefield. He said:

I get them to think about what they would do in that situation. Which is your sickest patient at the moment? Why do you think that?

I get them to think through some of the clinical decisions they would never face in the NHS. 'You've only got 10 ventilators, but you've got 11 patients who need it – what are you going to do?'

Keeping calm and carrying on

It's hard to imagine how someone as busy as Chris has managed to cope with it all. He says that lots of coffee helps, and he also points out the importance

of protecting whatever little spare time you have, and using it wisely. He said:

I'm a swimmer, I like to get in the pool and just go up and down and get things into perspective.

It's important to look at your successes. I've said this to people in Zambia when they get dispirited, and say 'It never changes here' I say, 'look how far you've come in such a short time.'

This is another strength that he attributes to his time in the Army. He said:

What the Army gives you is the ability to be realistic in what you can do. Focus on the basics and do them well. That gives you a reality check. In our project it's been about knowing what the Zambians want, how they want it delivered and on their timescales. My Army career has given me that grounding.

So, the decision he took a decade ago, to change the nature of his uniform from scrubs to camouflage pattern turned out to be the right one. Not just for Major Chris Carter, but for the people of Zambia too.

[Press release: Trade rises on one year to go until Brexit milestone](#)

- exports rise faster than imports
- trade deficit significantly narrows by £12.1 billion
- overall, UK exports of goods and services have increased by 12.1% to £622.1 billion.

With one year to go until the UK's departure from the European Union, new trade figures released (Thursday, 29 March) reveal exports of UK goods and services is at a record high.

UK exporters received a significant boost as the latest figures confirm global demand for UK goods and services is growing.

Data released from the Office for National Statistics shows in 2017, UK goods and services exports increased faster than imports – up 12.1% and 9.3%.

A drive in goods exports – up 13.4% – was due largely to demand for manufactured goods, and a rise in services exports – up 10.7% – was mainly driven for demand in UK business services. As a result the trade deficit

narrowed significantly by £12.1 billion to £28.6 billion from £40.7 billion.

Non-EU countries continue to be the main destination for services exports (£171.4 billion), making up 61.3% of all services exports.

Overall, UK exports of goods and services have increased by 12.1% to £622.1 billion.

Annually, the UK's current account deficit was £82.9 billion (4.1% of GDP) in 2017, a narrowing of £30.7 billion from a deficit of £113.6 billion in 2016; this is the narrowest deficit as a percentage of GDP since 2011 when it was 2.4%.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox said:

More than one year on since the EU referendum, there are strong reasons for the UK to be optimistic. UK exports of goods and services have increased over the year and the UK deficit on trade in goods and services narrowed significantly.

It's clear evidence that UK companies are succeeding on the world stage, and as an international economic department we are banging the drum for the growing demand for our goods and services.

The Department for International Trade

Statistics from the Department for International Trade (DIT) show that the UK attracted more [foreign direct investment projects](#) than ever before (year 2016 to 2017). With more than 2,200 projects recorded, the post-referendum figures show an increase of 2% on the previous year. This means more than 75,000 new jobs were created, and 32,600 safeguarded, amounting to over 2,000 jobs per week across the country.

Through [great.gov.uk](#), the department gives UK businesses access to millions of pounds' worth of potential overseas business. It also puts firms in touch with global buyers and since its launch it has promoted 11,400 export opportunities, and helped around 2.7 million users either begin or grow their exporting journeys.

Working to promote the UK to great trading nation, DIT has set up 14 working groups across 21 countries to strike trade deals and strengthen commercial ties with key trading partners.

Background

Read figures from the [ONS Balance of Payments](#) 29 March 2018.

Press release: Government to review powers to deal with unauthorised caravan sites

A government review of the law and powers to deal with unauthorised caravan sites and developments has been announced today (5 April 2018) by Housing Minister Dominic Raab.

Unauthorised sites can cause significant distress for both the settled and nomadic communities – an issue increasingly raised in Parliament over recent months.

Many local residents often raise concerns about anti-social behaviour including fly-tipping and noise, and evidence also shows that living on unauthorised sites can have a negative impact on people's health and education.

Since 2010, the number of traveller caravans on authorised sites has increased. However latest figures show approximately 16% of all caravans – around 3,700 – are on unauthorised sites.

Housing Minister Dominic Raab said:

The vast majority of the travelling community are decent and law-abiding people. But, we are particularly concerned about illegal traveller encampments, and some of the anti-social behaviour they can give rise to.

We must promote a tolerant society and make sure there are legal sites available for travellers, but equally the rule of law must be applied to everyone.

The government is committed to taking action and is seeking views on what more can be done to ensure local authorities, the police and landowners can deal with unauthorised sites and developments efficiently.

Ministers also want to hear about any barriers to the provision of authorised sites.

The consultation – carried out jointly by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Home Office and Ministry of Justice – covers police and local authority powers, court processes, government guidance, the provision of legal sites, and the impact on settled and nomadic communities.

It will emphasise the government's commitment to the fair and equal treatment of all communities, including respecting people's right to a nomadic way of

life, while balancing this with the interests of settled communities.

The existing powers for local authorities and the police to deal with unauthorised encampments can be found in [Dealing with illegal and unauthorised encampments](#), published in March 2015.

For any enquires about the consultation please contact UnauthorisedDevelopmentandEncampments@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Read a [report by the Traveller Movement](#), commissioned by the National Inclusion Health Board, looking at how the living conditions of Gypsies and Travellers lead to poor health.

Read the [consultation](#).

The consultation will run until 15 June.

[News story: English fishing vessels sought for trials which may help to reduce discards](#)

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is looking for English fishing vessels working in the North Sea to take part in three trial schemes which may help to reduce discards and encourage more selective fishing behaviour.

Vessels taking part in the trials may be fitted with remote electronic monitoring (REM) equipment or be involved in trying out new gears and may be awarded additional quota in return.

The MMO has run fully documented fisheries (FDF) schemes, sometimes referred to as catch quota trials, [since 2011](#). As part of these schemes remote electronic monitoring (REM) equipment is fitted to vessels to encourage a reduction in discards. In addition, REM has proven to be a useful tool for gathering scientific data. The MMO has collaborated with the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Sciences (Cefas) on exploring this use.

The MMO is [looking for English fishing vessels to apply](#) for two fully documented fisheries schemes in 2018:

1. North Sea Fully Documented Fisheries
2. North-East Nephrops Fully Documented Fisheries

The MMO is also looking for English vessels to take part in the North East Nephrops Net Selectivity trials which is looking to trial new gears which have the potential to be more selective.

North Sea Fully Documented Fisheries

To take part the vessel must be English-registered and a member of a Producer Organisation. In return for taking part in this scheme, vessels will be able to access additional quota for North Sea cod and saithe. In addition scientific quota may be available.

[Vessels must apply to take part by 16 April 2018.](#)

The aims of the scheme in 2018 are to:

- Test the use of REM as a control and enforcement tool
- To monitor compliance with fisheries legislation
- Test new developments in REM technologies
- Trial the use of inter-species flexibility (ISF)

North-East Nephrops

This is a new scheme for 2018. To take part vessels must be English-registered and work within the North East nephrops fishery. In return for participation in this scheme, vessels will be able to access additional quota for North Sea haddock and whiting. In addition, scientific quota for nephrops may be available.

[Vessels must apply to take part by 30 April 2018.](#)

The aims of this scheme are to:

- Test the use of REM as a control and enforcement tool within the nephrops fishery
- To monitor compliance with fisheries legislation
- Test new developments in REM technologies

North-East Nephrops Net Selectivity trials

This is a new scheme for 2018. To take part vessels must be English-registered and work within the North East nephrops fishery. When applying for this scheme vessels are asked to propose how they might improve their gear selectivity and the methods they will use to do this. In return for participation in this scheme, vessels will be able to access additional quota for North Sea haddock and whiting.

[Vessels must apply to take part by 30 April 2018.](#)

The aims of this scheme are to:

- Trial the use of highly selective gear to reduce discards and catches of below Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) fish
- To document the effects of using highly selective gear in this fishery

For more information on the scheme email ukcatchquota@defra.gov.uk or call 0300 123 1032.

[This blog post explains more](#) about how fully documented fisheries work in practice.