

WAR INNOCENTS

Civil war in Angola was over five years ago. Nevertheless 80,000 Angolans still suffer from the deep traces left by that conflict.

Even after guns have become silent, millions of land mines – buried in the soil since war times – still cause innocent victims among people on their way to the fields, to water sources... on their way to school.

The European Union together with other donator countries have funded several mine clearance operations in Angola, but millions of these devices have not been deactivated yet and several accidents have kept on occurring over the last years with calamitous consequences.

Amputee mine victims in Angola count today for 78% of the total number of the physically handicapped within the country. About 8,000 of those amputees are children and youngsters, who often suffer more serious injuries than adults in accidents with mines.

According to non-governmental organisations 30% to 50% of the victims of these accidents pass away before a surgery or after undergoing it, due to the long distances between the place of bursting and the hospital, the lack of conditions to transport the injured or inadequate medical care.

Angola also lacks experts skilled for the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped and for the few existing ones it is difficult to give an answer to so many requests. Apart from the physical consequences, injuries caused by mines have deep psychological impacts, especially as to self-esteem.

Physical rehabilitation of amputees in the Hospital S. João de Deus (Portugal)

Hospital S. João de Deus, located in Portugal, in the city of Montemor-o-Novo, has been providing care for more than 50 years – at the beginning only to children and currently to people of all ages – particularly in the areas of Orthopaedics and Physical Rehabilitation. Presently the hospital has one

operating theatre, hospitalization services, a gym, electrotherapy rooms, a swimming-pool and hydrotherapy equipment for treatment and rehabilitation, as well as orthopaedic workshops for the production of prostheses, orthoses and orthopaedic footwear.

The orthopaedic workshops of Hospital S. João de Deus started working in 1953, aiming at complementing physical recovery of children who were victim of infant poliomyelitis and were forced to wait for several months for the orthopaedic appliances required for their rehabilitation. Thus, the hospital could gain its independence, as these appliances started being produced in its own premises by former patients, who were hired and educated by the hospital on the several fields involved.

The orthopaedic workshops are today passing through a renovation process both in terms of technical professionals and available equipment. In 2003 and 2006 two training initiatives have taken place, resulting in the admission of 9 new collaborators. Since 2006 a programme for modernizing the workshop's equipment and facilities is also in progress. Although it has been already possible to buy new equipment with the support from Eugénio de Almeida Foundation, facilities require urgent extension and rearrangement.

Helping the "War Innocents"

Hospital S. João de Deus has created a dedicated team for this project, composed of doctors and rehabilitation technical staff. This team will perform the necessary surgeries and the subsequent adaptation of prostheses, orthoses and orthopaedic footwear to a group of 15 Angolan amputee children and youngsters, who were also victims of poliomyelitis. The Hospital will also make its premises available to receive the patients during the period required for their treatment.

As the management of the Hospital explains, this project "has its roots in the story of Hospital S. João de Deus, of treating poor and sick children. It is also an opportunity to develop technical competences in the field of rehabilitation in a brother country, and thus strengthen the work of the Brothers of St. John of God in a country where they have already been present and to where they will possibly come back in the near future".

Treatment, formation, development

The “Inocentes de Guerra” (*War Innocents*) campaign aims at developing a humanitarian project involving several entities and different angles of support:

- Treatment of a group of up to 15 children, victims of anti-personnel mines and infant poliomyelitis. These children will be selected by a Portuguese NGO present in Angola, by means of a cooperation agreement signed with the St. John of God Foundation.
- Training a group of 4 to 6 young Angolans in the field of prostheses, orthoses and orthopaedic footwear production, adaptation and maintenance. Training these technical staff members will be an important contribution to the future rehabilitation of the physically handicapped in Angola.
- Modernization of the facilities and equipment of the Hospital’s Orthopaedic Workshops.

The St. John of God Foundation caresses this initiative which connects Portugal to Angola in solidarity and has started a campaign aiming at raising funds enabling not only the rehabilitation of amputee children but also promoting the enhancement of the service provided by the Orthopaedic Workshops of Hospital S. João de Deus to orthopaedic patients in Portugal.

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