

# The Asian Reporter

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**BOMBHUNTERS.** Former Khmer Rouge amputees maimed from mines sit with their families while attending a ceremony at Anlong Veng, northern Cambodia. The nation is plagued by millions of land mines buried within its borders during decades of civil war. (AP Photo/Du Neakiny)

## Local filmmaker receives Fulbright Scholarship for landmine documentary

By Edward J. Han  
The Asian Reporter

**K**aboom! The sound and magnitude of a landmine explosion are difficult to describe with mere words. Thousands of Southeast Asians are killed or injured every year by landmines or unexploded ordnance (UXOs). In Cambodia alone, more than five million people are still at risk from the dangerous material that lies dormant in the soil. If an unlucky soul triggers such a device, the result is almost certain disfigurement, if not death.

Local filmmaker Skye Fitzgerald has received a Fulbright Scholarship to produce a documentary that will study the effects of landmines on Vietnamese and Cambodian people on both sides of the Pacific. The project, entitled *Bombhunters*,



will focus on professional deminers, whose fulltime vocation is to actively seek out these explosive devices.

One potential subject is a Cambodian named Aki-Ra. When the professional bomb hunter was five years old, the Khmer Rouge began training him to set landmines that would thwart the advance of Vietnamese troops and disrupt the actions of Cambodian resistance fighters. In 1986, the Vietnamese army captured Aki-Ra's

village and identified the young man's skills. He was forced to locate, move, and reactivate the booby traps. The process was repeated when the Cambodians reclaimed the taken land. Aki-Ra continues to hunt for mines, even though the government has downplayed the role of village deminers for the sake of tourism.

For many bomb hunters, the motivation to hunt for UXOs and mines is purely economical. The annual per capita income in Vietnam is just shy of \$500. In Cambodia it is around half that figure. A deactivated bomb can sometimes fetch \$100 due to high demand for the explosives by hunters and fishermen.

The main purpose of *Bombhunters* is to act as an educational tool. Many ordnance casualties are a result of mishandling the devices with the purpose of profit. The doc-

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## Local filmmaker producing landmine documentary

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umentary will tell the stories of village deminers and the dangers associated with the vocation. It will also explore the social and cultural effects of landmines on victims and their families and friends.

Fitzgerald is currently seeking interview subjects in the Pacific Northwest who have been directly or indirectly affected by a landmine or UXO explosions.

The film crew is scheduled to depart for Asia in October. Until then, fundraising events are

being organized.

The first of these events will take place at 6:00pm on Saturday, August 7 at 5916 N.E. Sumner Street, Portland. Chanrithy Him, a Khmer American and author of *When Broken*

*Glass Floats*, will attend the fundraiser.

For more information about the event or the project, contact Skye Fitzgerald at (503) 522-6313 or e-mail <skylersas@hotmail.com>.