

Catalyst for Change



At the end of World War II, the world was in shambles from virtually every perspective - physically, economically, socially and environmentally.

The war had been the most pervasive military conflict in human history, over land, on the seas and in the air. Sixty-one countries and many territories on six continents, as well as all the world's oceans, suffered devastating damage and long-term social, economic and environmental effects.

Only the Western hemisphere, parts of the Near East and sub-Saharan Africa were unscathed.

Wars are most notorious for their tolls on human populations, but they also severely affect ecosystems. Rivers and lakes, jungles and forests and farmlands and deltas were obliterated, with dangerous wastes left behind. Hundreds of cities were demolished and many others rendered virtually uninhabitable. Infrastructure was decimated, bridges, roads and railroads were laid to waste and rendered non-functional.

Almost 60 million civilians and military personnel were killed and tens of millions more were seriously injured and/or permanently maimed. War-induced famines took the lives of more than 2 million more in Africa and Asia. Millions remained homeless throughout the war-torn world.

Thousands more were captives of foreign nations, even at home. According to the International Registry of sunken ships, more than 12,500 sunken vessels including battleships, aircraft carriers, destroyers, landing craft and more than 5000 merchant ships were scattered on ocean floors.

Governments estimate that more than 335,000 aircraft were lost, primarily over Europe, Asia and Africa.

Thousands of tonnes of unexploded ordnance including mines, bombs and various forms of ammunition litter seabeds, fields, jungles caves and even home gardens.

More than 60 years after the end of the war, experts estimate that it could take another 150 years to clear the detritus and neutralise the hazardous content, which continues to pose dire threats to the environment, humans and creatures in the seas, on land and in the air.

In addition to military debris, every type of waste imaginable, from natural to synthetic materials, including construction rubble, plastic debris, synthetic rubber, electronic equipment and parts, transistors, microwave materials, and synthetic fuels, among hundreds of others, became the residue of the war and had to be treated and disposed.