

U.S. HUMANITARIAN MINE ACTION: MAKING THE WORLD SAFER

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The United States is a world leader in humanitarian mine action, having contributed over half of the \$1.7 billion invested worldwide in mitigating the effects of persistent landmines since 1993. The U.S. departments of State, Defense, and Education, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention operate significant mine action programs that work in concert as the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program, says Bloomfield. Mine action embodies American core values — respect for human life, caring in the face of human suffering, and support for economic independence and self-sufficiency.

Persistent landmines, the residue of past wars, insurgencies, and internal reigns of terror, kill or maim thousands of people each year in dozens of countries around the world. Untold numbers of persistent (or dumb) landmines, estimated in the millions, infest areas in every hemisphere. Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) disrupt humanitarian aid delivery, agriculture, trade, education, and social development. These explosive remnants of war drain scarce public health resources and impede post-conflict reconstruction and economic recovery in impoverished areas most in need of relief. Landmine contamination is a humanitarian disaster that perpetuates poverty, desperation, and regional instability.

Humanitarian mine action (HMA) is the term used to encompass landmine detection and clearance; mine risk education; landmine survivor assistance; and research and development of new clearance techniques and technologies. Since 1993 alone, when the United States established its inter-agency mine action program to formalize its humanitarian demining efforts that first began in 1988, it has invested over \$700 million dollars in mine action. The landmines that are cleared by this program have almost entirely been manufactured and emplaced by other governments or regimes, some of which no longer exist, and by non-state actors — which include

guerilla groups, civilians involved in inter-communal strife, bandits, and terrorists.

Humanitarian mine action is a bipartisan issue that has received broad and growing support from both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. Congress. The Clinton administration launched the first formal Humanitarian Demining Program, and the Bush administration continues to strengthen it. Mine action embodies American core values — respect for life, caring in the face of human suffering, support for economic independence and self-sufficiency, and concern for wildlife and domestic animals.

U.S. LEADERSHIP — HOLDING THE COURSE

The first mine clearance programs were established in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Afghanistan and Cambodia. These programs, financed in large part by the U.S. government, laid the foundation for a worldwide movement that galvanized international opinion and mobilized significant financial resources to address the disasters caused by the indiscriminate use of persistent landmines. Today, U.S. programs operate in coordination with multinational and intergovernmental organizations to encourage indigenous mine action capability so mine-affected countries can sustain their own programs.

The United States was a founding member of the first international landmine treaty, the Amended Mines Protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which governs the use of anti-personnel landmines as well as anti-vehicle mines, improvised explosive devices, and booby traps. By contrast the Ottawa Convention to ban landmines deals only with anti-personnel landmines and is silent on these other devices. The United States helped to draft the Amendment in the early 1980s; it entered into force in 1998 and was ratified by the United States in May 1999.

Other important milestones in the U.S. effort to ensure that it did not aggravate the global landmine problem:

1992 — Implemented a unilateral ban on the export of its anti-personnel landmines.

1996 — Initiated the unilateral removal of its landmines from the perimeter of the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba, the last permanent U.S.-controlled minefield in the world. Clearance was completed in 1999 and quality assurance checks in 2000.

1997 — Designated a senior U.S. government official as the President's Special Representative for Mine Action and established offices in the State Department to focus on mine action programs and partnerships.

1998 — Completed the unilateral destruction of 3.3 million non-self-destructing landmines, retaining only enough for training, research and development, and the defense of South Korea. The majority of the landmines in the U.S. arsenal are of the self-destructing/self-deactivating type that do not cause the kinds of suffering and long-term problems posed by persistent landmines decades after they are emplaced.

2001 — Established the world's first Quick Reaction Demining Force to reinforce cease-fires and peace settlements around the globe, and to hasten the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and the movement of relief efforts.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

International efforts have greatly accelerated mine action programs. To date:

- Thousands of square kilometers of land have been cleared in nearly 60 countries.
- The number of landmine victims reported each year has declined by more than half from 26,000 annually.
- Each year since 2000, more mines have been removed than reportedly laid.
- A wide range of demining technologies and methods have become available, including mine resistant vegetation clearance vehicles, improved personal protective equipment, and teams of mine detecting dogs and trained handlers, resulting in dramatic increases in productivity and safety.
- A refined set of international standards and protocols has been created to address all aspects of humanitarian mine action, further increasing mine action efficiencies and productivity.

In early demining programs, success was measured by numbers of mines cleared, but this does not satisfactorily assess the degree to which mine clearance programs provide public access to land or infrastructure. Similarly, counting the number of people who attend a mine risk education course does not tell us whether the course effectively changed risky behaviors.

We must be able to link levels of effort to specific social and economic outputs like increased food production, roads restored, decreased casualty rates, and improved livelihoods. Donor fatigue is a real concern in a world with competing demands; so officials involved in mine removal must adopt the most meaningful performance measures possible to attract resources for their efforts.

Humanitarian mine action programs must focus efforts where the need is the greatest, balancing risk with resources to determine the best use of available

funding. Program plans should outline an intended “end state” for international assistance, identifying means to ensure that the most acute threats to a country are removed immediately while less pressing requirements are addressed later. For example, results from recent landmine impact surveys in Chad and Yemen clearly indicated that lands posing the greatest risk of casualties and the most economic harm in those cases actually comprised a small fraction of the total contaminated area.

Affected countries themselves must make mine action a national priority and integrate it into their development programs. U.S. efforts focus on enabling countries to carry out their own demining programs so we can gradually shift assistance to other mine-affected nations. Recipient governments must take responsibility for allocating national resources to mine action and assuming program management. Where resources are scarce and declining, countries must make difficult priority decisions for solving their mine problems.

EXPANDING THE VISION

The environmental devastation that results from widespread mine and UXO contamination compounds problems of hunger, poverty, and economic deprivation. Demobilized soldiers and poorly disciplined militias with large quantities of small arms and other light weapons undermine stability and rule of law. The global community must cooperate in attacking these problems.

Humanitarian mine action efforts should be expanded to include a comprehensive response to heal the wounds of war and to generate economic opportunity. Communities whose inhabitants can grow their own food and transport their goods to market, whose young people have opportunities other than soldiering, and whose children can walk to school in safety, are basic to the establishment of stable societies.

Humanitarian mine action is not an end in itself: the measure of its success is reconstruction, reconciliation, and development. To measure up,

affected countries must develop the capacity to manage and implement self-sustaining demining programs. This means, in part, reducing the number of expatriates working in mine removal and increasing the numbers of indigenous workers in the effort.

COLLABORATION IS KEY

Achieving a world safe from landmines and other explosive remnants of war requires more than money. The entire mine action community must work together to ensure that our collective efforts are complementary and our aims compatible. Cooperative funding initiatives, such as the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) based in Slovenia, whose mandate covers the Balkans and the Caucasus, offer a model for pooling resources. By establishing a matching grant system, the United States and 29 other donors have mobilized more than \$100 million to support regional mine action. The United States is also working closely with the European Union to coordinate information management as well as our geographic information systems (GIS) and impact survey efforts.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The costs of removing millions of landmines around the world are enormous, as are the associated costs of providing trauma care, rehabilitation, prosthetics, and other support for landmine survivors and development aid for local, regional, and national economies devastated by war. Governments alone do not have sufficient resources to address these needs. Individual citizens, civic and religious associations, non-governmental organizations, charities, and corporations must, and do, play a vital role in humanitarian mine action.

The U.S. Department of State initiated its Mine Action Public-Private Partnership program in 1999. To date, the effort has produced more than 40 partnerships that help support the difficult but necessary work of clearing mines, teaching at-risk populations to avoid mined areas and dangerous

behavior with explosive devices, and helping survivors regain their dignity and independence. Private and non-profit contributors to humanitarian mine action continue to make significant contributions to the cause; and, they deserve credit for what has been achieved to date.

THE WAY AHEAD

A comprehensive review of U.S. government landmine policy is underway. A wide range of private citizens and non-governmental organizations are contributing to this deliberative interagency process that will attempt to balance humanitarian

concerns with our country's unique security responsibilities.

The global community has learned a great deal since the inception of humanitarian mine action just over a decade ago. The governments of donor and mine-affected nations, international organizations, and the private sector have created a formidable international network to confront the problem of mines. Working together, we can free the world of the effects of landmines and unexploded ordnance, and restore peace, stability, and security to war-ravaged societies. ●