

Videotaped Remarks on the Occasion of the Hermès-Roots of Peace "Harvest of Hope" Luncheon

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action
Grgich Hills Cellar
Napa Valley, CA
November 8, 2002

Salutations to Heidi Kuhn, Founder of Roots of Peace; Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, Chairperson of the Harvest of Hope campaign; and other distinguished women present today who are concerned with the global landmine problem. I thank Hermès of Paris whose generous support has enabled this gathering to take place.

I regret that I cannot join you at the home of your gracious hosts, Erika and Austin Hills, to show my support for Roots of Peace and its "Harvest of Hope" campaign to help demine Afghanistan's Shomali Valley and restore it as a vital source of sustenance to the Afghan people.

I hope that the Shomali Valley, once cleared of the landmines and unexploded ordnance that infest it, will also provide Afghanistan with a source of export income from its famous grapes and other fruits.

As Secretary Powell said earlier this year, "Public-private partnerships will be crucial to find the money needed to help nations address the daunting problems that they face in their development."

One of the daunting problems faced by nearly 70 nations around the world, including Afghanistan, is the threat posed by landmines.

Through events like this luncheon and our recent Department of State-Rotary International landmine conference in Seattle, we see the power of the private sector. I am grateful to the women joining this "leadership circle" led by Dede Wilsey -- Erika Hills, Eleanor Coppola, Gina Gallo, Violet Grgich, Philippa Jones, Judy Jordan, Margrit Mondavi, Joan Platt and Kim Wallace -- California vintners who have recognized this for several years already and who have worked with Roots of Peace to eradicate the terrible hazard of landmines -- a man-made, long-lasting menace that threatens innocent people and contaminates valuable agricultural land.

Mine action encompasses mine clearance, survivor assistance, mine risk education, and research and development into new technologies -- all of which are supported by U.S. programs as well as mine action programs of France and other donor nations. But mine action is more than the sum of those parts. Landmines place a huge and undeserved burden on developing societies; they are often a feature of crisis areas, where political repression, lawlessness and patterns of violence take hold, resulting in hunger, poverty and economic deprivation. So mine action is a basic element of post-conflict reconstruction and national reconciliation.

The countries and villages that receive our help are in the emergency room and we are -- all of us -- providing intensive care. Our goal is to restore them to the point where they can continue recovering without our ministering to them permanently.

As we are seeing today in much of Afghanistan, the very first thing that one must do when hostilities end is to make the land accessible by clearing mines. In Kabul and other areas, the first people in on the heels of the combatants last fall were the deminers -- almost all of whom, by the way, are well-trained Afghans. Humanitarian assistance cannot get through without safe roads, airfields, and footpaths.

In the late 1980s and early 1990's the first mine clearance programs were taking shape first in Afghanistan and then Cambodia. In subsequent years, these fledgling initiatives grew into a worldwide effort. The American people helped to fund these first demining programs and the United States has remained very active in the process ever since.

The U.S. Government has spent over \$600 million dollars on mine action since 1993 in 45 countries. In 2002 alone, we provided \$104 million to 39 countries, including nearly \$11.6 million to Afghanistan. This is a major commitment by the United States.

The results from our programs and those of other donor nations to date are very good. Although it is difficult to compile precise casualty information everywhere, recent findings indicate that the reported number of victims per year has dropped from approximately 26,000 to less than half that amount. That is still far too many; but we know we are making real progress. Similarly, since 2000, there have been fewer mines going into the ground than have been coming out. We all want to keep it that way.

Donor fatigue is a real concern in a world with so many compelling needs. But I see dramatic benefits resulting from all donations, large and small. I want mine action donors to see it too.

Mine-affected countries themselves have a greater role from here on. They must "take ownership" and establish credible national strategic plans, managing their own activities, setting priorities and making the most of the funds provided.

But for all of the progress that has been made and for all the prescriptions that we offer to mine affected countries, it is clear to me that there are more needs and worthy mine action programs out there than there are available dollars.

Therefore, we think a key to success is to expand the funding base for mine action with significant participation from more private sources in the coming years. Within the State Department we have an Office of Mine Action and Initiatives and Partnerships coordinating some 30 public-private partnerships already engaged in mine action. Today we salute non-governmental organizations such as Roots of Peace and private companies, such as Grgich Hills Cellar and other leading California vintners, for their special place in the world of mine action. Our State Department team is ready and eager to engage willing partners from America's great private sector, who bring unique expertise, talent and ideas, as well as resources.

Just as no one who steps on a live landmine walks away, I have observed that no one who gets involved in mine action walks away either. This is fulfilling work that rewards our energy and passion. I ask each of you to get involved.

Given the talent, commitment and energy that all of you bring to the cause, we can succeed. That is my conviction, and I look forward to pursuing it with you.

Thank you all so much for coming together today to support the "Harvest of Hope."

[End]