

Champions for Children

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Remarks at the U.S. Fund for UNICEF-Marshall Legacy Institute
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Thank you Sam [Donaldson]...

I am delighted to be here to honor four extraordinary humans -- Her Majesty Queen Noor; Senator Hagel (R-NE); Senator Leahy (D-VT); Mr. Jim Kimsey (founder of AOL and Kimsey Foundation) -- and one canine hero, Brenda the mine detecting dog. All are genuine "Champions for Children" and committed to the cause of humanitarian demining.

I want to say a few words about the U.S. Government's longstanding efforts to make the world mine safe.

Together with other donor nations, international organizations such as UNICEF, and non-governmental organizations such as the Marshall Legacy Institute, I believe that we have turned the corner in the battle against these "hidden killers." But we cannot declare victory yet. Millions of landmines still await victims. So we must redouble our collective efforts to win this deadly foot race - getting to those mines before more innocent people trigger them.

The U.S. Government's contribution to humanitarian demining, an investment of over \$600 million dollars in 45 countries since 1993 *alone*, has helped to significantly reduce landmine casualties. Reported casualties were down to less than 10,000 in the year 2000. And much arable land has been returned to productive use.

One of the pillars of the U.S.'s humanitarian demining credo is that individual citizens, civic and religious associations, non-governmental organizations, and corporations have a vital role to play in helping to combat the harmful effects caused by landmines.

At the State Department we have already cultivated over two dozen public-private partnerships to reinforce mine action efforts worldwide. To those who are participating in these partnerships, I extend our heartfelt gratitude. Your contributions have made a difference. You deserve credit for what has been achieved so far.

We have worked with UNICEF in the past on mine awareness -- or what we now call mine risk education - in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Central America. Today we cooperate with UNICEF on new projects, including a primary school unexploded ordnance curriculum in Laos, mine risk education for teachers in Azerbaijan, a physical rehabilitation program in Liberia, and a \$700,000 mine risk education initiative in Afghanistan.

The Marshall Legacy Institute's K9 demining teams have detected mines in Nicaragua displaced by Hurricane Mitch, currently assist Lebanon to demine various parts of its country, and perform valuable area reduction and quality assurance to demining in Eritrea.

There are hundreds of mine detecting dog teams operating around the world, including teams provided by MLI in cooperation with the U.S. Humanitarian Demining Program. More are needed to help win the deadly foot race to find landmines before more children and adults find them first.

This Administration remains firmly committed to eliminating the threat posed by landmines and to assisting landmine survivors to lead productive lives. To that end, the U.S. Government's Humanitarian Demining Program will spend \$101 million dollars this fiscal year in 39 countries on all aspects of mine action. Of that, \$8.6 million is devoted to demining assistance in Afghanistan.

For me, humanitarian mine action is very much about mines and getting them out of ground. But it is even more about the devastating social and economic effects that mines have on people, innocent people whose lives and livelihoods are too often

destroyed by these devices. We should recognize the direct connection that our work has with the advancement of national reconciliation and social stability in crisis-affected areas.

In addressing the legacy of landmines, we not only are helping to keep innocents out of harm's way and restore valuable land to productive use, but we are providing something larger to entire communities ravaged by war. That something is hope. Hope that the future will be better than the present and hope that the grim patterns of political hostilities and social dislocation can give way to a return to normality and a secure and more tranquil life.

The challenge remains immense, but so is our collective commitment and energy. Working together, we will permit future generations of children to 'walk the earth in safety.'

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