

## Ending the Tragedy of Landmines Through Innovation and Cooperation

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action

Remarks to Rotary International-Department of State Landmine Conference

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I would like to thank [Rotary International](#) and our gracious hosts of Rotary District 5030 and Rotary Zones 23 and 24. I particularly want to recognize Wilfred (Wilf) Wilkinson of the Rotary Foundation; Rosemary Aragon, Governor of Rotary International District 5030; Sally Mackle, Conference Planning Chairperson from the Seattle Four Rotary Club; and the fine team of Rotarians who have organized this conference. Thanks also to the [Mine Action Information Center](#) at James Madison University for its support in helping bring this Conference together.

I welcome our distinguished panelists, each of whom is among the world's leading experts in humanitarian mine action, an elite group in the most complimentary sense, I assure you. I thank and welcome all Rotary members and other concerned citizens who have traveled here from throughout the beautiful Pacific Northwest and from around the world. Several of the Rotary members here today have come from mine-affected countries. I look forward to hearing from you. Finally, I thank the educators and students who have joined us, bringing their interest and enthusiasm and a fresh perspective on a challenging problem.

That problem, of course, is the threat to innocent, unsuspecting people from landmines left behind from armed conflict.

All of us here are connected by a shared desire to end this threat and help the survivors and their societies lead productive lives, unburdened of the danger of landmines.

Some of you have been involved in and committed to mine action for a long time; others may be initiated to the subject today.

For my part, I had the good fortune of a friend introducing me to this subject. Coming from my home town of Cohasset, Massachusetts, a man named Jerry White, who had stepped on a landmine while touring the Golan Heights as a college student, co-founded an organization called the [Landmine Survivors Network](#) (LSN).

As a founding Board member, I watched Landmine Survivors Network quickly become a force for good in the lives of many people in need on several continents.

I also discovered something that many of you may discover at this conference and in the months and years ahead: once you learn to contribute to mine action, you won't let go. Your efforts, your passion and your commitment will be richly rewarded.

Why? Because this is a big problem and a lot of help is needed -- YOUR help is needed.

I had no inkling, when I joined Secretary Powell's team at the State Department last year, that the additional role as Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action would be assigned to me.

In accepting this mission, I recognized that there is no effort too large and no rate of progress too fast, in trying to prevent further casualties, help survivors reclaim productive and fulfilling lives, and return mine infested lands to productive use.

The U.S. Government is doing a lot and I am hopeful it will do even more. Private entities and individuals are also doing a lot and - no surprise -- I feel the American private sector and the American people can do even more. That is why one of the offices in the State Department, the Office of Mine Action Initiatives and Partnerships, specializes in partnering with private entities to draw on the talents and generosity of Americans to attack the mine action challenge worldwide.

Many of you may be familiar with the policy issue of landmines in the context of the Ottawa Convention and you know of the U.S. decision that it could not join this treaty as it was finalized about five years ago. Despite that outcome, the United States has

sustained a deep and strong commitment to humanitarian mine action and to the shared goal of a world free from the hurtful effects of landmines. Indeed, the U.S. Government has been a strong and generous supporter of mine action since 1988. Our efforts, along with others in the world community, have made real progress in ridding the world of landmines. Funding for demining programs has gone up, the rate of casualties has declined, and mine risk education programs are saving lives.

This conference is a superb example of the innovative public-private partnerships that we are fostering to make the world "mine-safe."

Over the past four years we have developed a coalition of some 30 organizations that are helping create a world safe from the threat of landmines. And we are very excited about our growing partnership with Rotary International, one of the most important service organizations in the world.

Some of you here may not be familiar with terms such as "mine action" or with landmine issues overall.

By the end of this Conference I am confident that you will be more knowledgeable about the terms and issues and have a good idea about the areas that you and your Rotary club might wish to pursue. Many Rotary Clubs are already engaged in mine action projects and we have invited several of them to make presentations here in Seattle. You will hear the story of their success.

I see this conference as an investment in the future. We hope to build upon the enthusiasm demonstrated by our District 5030 hosts, the interest of Rotary International's headquarters in Evanston, Illinois, and the potential observed at the recent Barcelona Conference, to build a foundation for further action. I believe that Rotary International can find in humanitarian mine action another global challenge worthy of following its efforts to eradicate polio.

I strongly encourage everyone to visit with each of our public-private partners in mine action that have set up information tables for your benefit. Many traveled great distances to be here. They're here to be of assistance to you. Please visit their tables, talk to them, and be sure to pick up their information materials. You can learn and gain inspiration from them as well as from your fellow Rotarians from mine affected countries. I'll be doing the same thing.

So I look forward to meeting with you, hearing your thoughts and impressions, and participating in a very productive conference. I also look forward to a growing collaboration between Rotary International and the Department of State.

Thank you all very much.

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