

Honoring Humanitarian Mine Action Initiatives

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action
United States Tennis Association (USTA) Event
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[The following remarks were given at a United States Tennis Association (USTA) event honoring Humanitarian Mine Action initiatives by the USTA, U.S. Davis Cup team, and U.S. Fed Cup team held in the Skybox of USTA President Alan Schwartz at the U.S. Open Tournament, Arthur Ashe Stadium – USTA National Tennis Center.]

Thank you, President Schwartz.

You might think that there is little connection between a tennis ball and an anti-personnel landmine, but they are about the same size, cheap to produce, and both can be found on the playing fields in war torn communities.

Untold millions of persistent anti-personnel as well as anti-vehicle landmines lie in wait in some 60 countries around the world, keeping farmers from their fields, villagers from their homes, and children from their schools and play grounds. In too many countries, minefields have replaced the playing fields.

Thousands of innocent civilians -- many of them young children -- are killed or maimed by landmines every year. Just imagine if American citizens, and particularly our children, had to negotiate minefields in order to go to school or to get to tennis courts and soccer fields.

No one knows precisely how many landmines are scattered around the world. But most of them must be cleared one mine at a time -- a dangerous and painstaking process.

Yet I want to assure you that our country has been one of the earliest and most generous supporters of humanitarian mine action. Since 1993 the U.S. Government has invested over \$900 million to clear landmines in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, in Southeast Asia and Africa, in Latin America and in the Balkans. We also are funding mine risk education campaigns to reduce landmine casualties, and providing rehabilitation treatment and services for survivors of landmine accidents.

Governments alone cannot solve this problem. We need and appreciate the help of the private sector and are currently working with over 40 organizations in our partnership program. Americans are a generous and caring people and I want to thank the USTA and the players and officials of our Davis and Fed Cup teams who have helped to raise awareness and resources for mine action programs in Croatia and Slovenia.

In 2003 the U.S. Davis Cup team was instrumental in organizing a \$25,000 contribution from the USTA that was matched by the U.S. government. The \$50,000 total was used to demine 48,000 square meters of land adjoining a once popular tennis court in a village near Zagreb. And following their matches in Slovenia this past spring, the women of the Fed Cup team donated their warm up suits, racquets and other equipment for a charity auction that raised \$25,000 to treat landmine survivors at the rehabilitation hospital in the capital, Ljubljana.

Putting tennis and the competition aside, these ambassadors of good will took time during their trips to Croatia and Slovenia to visit minefields and rehabilitation clinics -- experiencing first hand the ravages of war and its deadly legacy.

I extend my sincere appreciation to Alan Schwartz and the players and officials of the USTA. You are all champions in my book and in our fight to remove the deadly debris of war, assist those who have been injured and rebuild shattered economies. Thank you so much for your support.

President Schwartz, please accept these items and letters of appreciation from the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, the Slovenian Tennis Federation, and the Slovenian Institute for Rehabilitation. Thank you.

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