

Humanitarian Mine Action

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Governor Jim, Dr. Michael Finkel and members of District 6960, thank you very much for inviting me to participate in your district conference. After the sad mood of Washington this past week marking the passing of President Reagan, it is a pleasure to be with you this evening, here in these beautiful surroundings and to learn more about the many humanitarian projects you support. I am particularly honored to be part of your coronation ceremony, and know that Governor Jerry will do very well.

In my travels I often see the Rotary Wheel in cities, towns and villages around the world. Rotary is truly a global organization, uniting people everywhere whose good works and humanitarian principles have improved the lives of millions of their fellow human beings.

As Rotary International prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary, you can be very proud of what you have accomplished and for that I salute you.

The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, which I lead inside the State Department, serves as our principal link with the Pentagon. We advise and assist Secretary Powell on international security issues and work with other governments to allow our forces to move around the world and conduct military operations.

We help build and sustain coalitions such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan and we work in many ways to help stabilize conflict areas after hostilities end. One of my biggest portfolios is the regulation of our country's arms exports and defense trade.

The basic goals of everything we do are to combat terrorism, promote stability through security partnerships, and provide humanitarian assistance.

I also have the privilege of serving as the Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action. In this capacity, I direct programs designed to remove landmines and unexploded ordnance in many countries around the world, to help warn people of any landmine dangers where they live, and to assist the unfortunate victims of landmine explosions.

In parallel with these post-conflict programs, we also work on keeping new dangers in check by trying to disrupt the illicit trade of small arms and light weapons to conflict areas, terrorist groups, and narco-traffickers.

Since 1993, the United States has provided over \$800 million for mine action programs in 46 countries. We have funded mine clearance, national landmine surveys, medical and rehabilitation services, and mine risk education.

Through steady engagement and assistance, we have helped countries rid themselves of the dangerous and unwanted remnants of war. I hope many of you here visited the mock minefield brought to Captiva Island by a team from the Defense Department's Humanitarian Demining Training Center at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Bill, Marty, please stand up and take a bow. Great job, guys.

For those of you who have never before walked through a simulated minefield, this was a chance to experience first-hand the insidious nature of these hidden killers that can lie for months, years and even decades, waiting to explode under an innocent foot.

Ten years ago, when the world community first turned its attention to what we called “humanitarian demining,” the problem looked almost hopeless. Early estimates were that over 100 million landmines were on or under the ground in some 60 countries accounting for tens of thousands of civilian casualties. As clearance work got underway, we learned that the problem was not just a matter of numbers, but more importantly the impact on these people, their families, their villages and towns, and the countries as a whole. A dozen landmines that prevent refugees from returning to their village after a conflict ends are much more significant than 1,000 mines in a minefield on a remote frontier that has been marked by the responsible military force according to international standards.

There are many factors to look at when we consider the impact of landmines and think about how to organize our efforts according to certain humanitarian priorities. I am sure I am not alone in placing the highest priority on avoiding human casualties. As the landmine crisis came into focus in the 1990’s before the international mine action effort could be put into full effect, estimates were that landmines were killing or injuring 26,000 people per year—a staggering toll.

Today, I can report to you that the picture has improved significantly. Several countries have been declared mine safe and substantial progress has been made in some of the world’s most mine-affected countries including Angola, Mozambique, Cambodia and Afghanistan. Most importantly, the estimated human casualty rate has dropped from 26,000 per year to approximately 10,000 per year. I am sure we all agree that 10,000 landmine casualties is 10,000 too many. We will be supporting the already large community of current landmine survivors for many years to come, and do not wish to see that community of several hundred thousand survivors grow any larger.

But let’s not overlook the message that these numbers are sending: mine action works. In less than a decade, the international community has made huge strides in addressing this humanitarian crisis. Now is the time to learn from the past, refocus our efforts, and make a concerted effort with the rest of the mine action community around the world to get this problem under control once and for all.

The U.S. contributes more than any other nation to mine action programs around the world. The U.S. Government was already the leading donor before President Bush decided to seek a 50% increase next year over the FY 2003 level, to a level of \$70 million for our State Department programs.

We now have a strategic plan that lists our program objectives, identifies priority countries, and calls for clearly defined measures of effectiveness, so we know when we are succeeding, and when we need to adjust our approach. And so, we have already begun to shift gears and tackle the entire global problem with renewed vision, energy and resources. And even as we look at what might be accomplished in the coming 5-10 years, we are also ready to act fast when new and urgent situations arise.

Last month there was a diplomatic breakthrough in Sudan. After over 20 years of civil war, a peace agreement has been signed. The U.S. and other donor governments are already moving forward with a mine action program. This is necessary to provide for the safe transit of refugees and the delivery of humanitarian aid. Removing mines will be essential for Sudan to take the first steps toward economic development, and it will provide a visible confidence building measure among the warring parties.

Two years ago the Department of State provided the first humanitarian mine clearance assistance to Sudan and we have remained engaged ever since. Now, we are surveying a major regional airfield in the south. Once it is cleared of mines, this airfield will enable the safe, efficient and rapid delivery of critically-needed food and medical assistance to a region made desperate by war.

Let me also say a word about Iraq, which has a serious landmine problem as well as a deadly problem of abandoned ordnance that poses an even greater threat. We sent demining personnel into Iraq last April, right after major conflict ended. They quickly went to work, clearing unexploded ordnance in built-up urban neighborhoods, and demining areas near power lines and facilities to enable the delivery of electricity. Our team recruited 50 very well qualified Iraqi professionals from all sectors of the population and built a very capable Iraqi National Mine Action Authority—the very first in Iraq’s troubled history. With help from the State Department and international mine action NGOs working in Iraq, Iraq has been acquiring the capacity to carry on this important effort on its own.

Let me add that I and my bureau have been involved in the larger effort in Iraq, including working with military coalition partners to maintain political backing for their efforts in the face of daily attacks, and challenges such as bombings, hostage-taking and executions. It is important to bear in mind the political steps that are taking place there. In just the last two weeks, Iraq has gained a new interim government and the UN Security Council has passed a unanimous resolution endorsing its future path. And in just over two weeks, the occupation of Iraq will end and Iraq will be led by a fully sovereign interim government of its own people. What a sight we saw the other day when the President of the United States was sitting with the President of a free Iraq.

How significant are these major political developments? Only time will tell if Iraqis feel more loyal to a government of

their own people and deny support to those who have been engaged in violent opposition. But as Iraq moves towards elections in the months ahead, and then to a fully sovereign elected government by the end of next year, I can certainly see the country turning the corner toward better security, which will bring faster economic reconstruction and prosperity. The extremists will lose in Iraq, just as they are losing in Afghanistan. The key is the courage of our soldiers and diplomats, backed by the resolve of our government, other contributing governments, and the citizens they represent.

In my job, the more I see the full dimensions of conflict, including its causes and its consequences, the more deeply I believe that we cannot turn away from these tough problem areas and hope we will be spared any trouble later on. The fact is, many Americans share the burdens of war overseas, either by losing a loved one or being injured by the weapons now favored by our adversaries.

The fact is that the victims of landmines and roadside bombs in Afghanistan and Iraq are not only local citizens. Many aid workers and U.S. military personnel have lost their lives or limbs while helping to rebuild these war-torn countries. The survivors among them, once back home in the United States, will experience first-hand the same challenges faced by landmine survivors in Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia, and scores of other countries.

For many years, the Rotary Clubs throughout the world have been assisting landmine survivors. I am sure that Rotarians are continuing this commitment today, helping our injured servicemen and women as they return to civilian life. And so, like others in mine action, Rotary is active in supporting demining activities and survivor assistance—two key aspects of mine action.

I'd like to say a word about landmine policy, since that has a bearing on how governments shape their support for mine action activities. Many of you may be aware that earlier this year we announced the results of President Bush's review and decisions on landmine policy. This is where our intent to seek from Congress a 50% increase in humanitarian mine action funding was determined.

As part of that policy, the U.S. military was directed to cease, permanently, the use of persistent landmines of any kind—deadly anti-vehicle mines as well as anti-personnel mines—by a date certain, which is the end of 2010. Destruction of these obsolescent weapons is to begin within two years. In the meantime, the Pentagon was directed not to use landmines after the end of this year that fail to contain a minimum of eight grams of iron ore equivalent, which is the standard of detectability in international law. The President also directed an energetic effort to develop suitable alternatives to these persistent munitions that can cause so much harm long after the military battle has ended.

In recent weeks, the Administration has begun to explore the possibility of sponsoring an international ban on the transfer of persistent landmines of any kind. This would apply new restraints to the larger category of landmines known as anti-vehicle or anti-tank mines.

Although this policy broke new ground and enhanced the position of the U.S. as a world leader in humanitarian mine action, many people have asked, "why hasn't the United States signed the Ottawa Convention that bans anti-personnel landmines?" After all, most of the world's countries have signed Ottawa. It is a reasonable question, since the Ottawa Convention has been the diplomatic and policy centerpiece of mine action from many of the key contributors responsible for the progress we have made around the world in the last several years.

Simply put: we did not sign that convention because our military commanders made a judgement, supported by the President, that they may still need certain munitions in their arsenal to protect U.S. servicemen and women in harm's way, or our allies, or the populations they are defending. The munitions we will keep are anti-vehicle and anti-personnel landmines containing special features that cause the munition to self-destruct within hours or days, and that have a self-deactivating battery that renders the munition completely inert within 90 days if it has not already self-destructed. No munition is perfect, but to give you an idea about the weapons we are keeping in the force I would note that the self-destruct and self-deactivate technology has been tested 60,000 times without a single test failure. I know of no case in which one of these munitions, in the hands of our military, has ever caused an innocent civilian casualty.

As it happens, the Ottawa Convention does not make any distinction between an anti-personnel landmine that waits for 10 or 20 years in a forest or field until an unsuspecting person steps on it and an American version that is only a live mine for several hours, days or weeks, when it is serving a military purpose. More importantly, the Ottawa Convention only covers the smaller type of persistent landmine, the anti-personnel landmine. It imposes no restriction whatsoever on larger anti-vehicle landmines, which have been a major cause of the humanitarian crisis as well.

The United States is the first country to make a comprehensive pledge not to use persistent landmines of any kind. I am very hopeful that our example will cause other major military powers—who have generally also not signed the Ottawa Convention—to think about following our lead.

Let me also note that the United States has signed and ratified the *other* international landmine treaty: the Amended

Mines Protocol of the Convention on Conventional Weapons. This protocol imposes international legal standards on the use of anti-personnel mines as well as anti-vehicle mines, improvised explosive devices, and booby traps. Again, the Ottawa Convention is silent on all these types of victim-activated devices except for anti-personnel landmines.

But enough about policy. I will be happy to discuss any questions you may have in a minute. Policy is important; but mine action is about action:

- Real action to protect people from an immediate threat and often mortal threat.
- Real action to teach people—young and old—how to recognize and avoid landmines.
- Real programs that heal and rehabilitate landmine survivors.

The worldwide mine action community has achieved a lot in the past ten years. The U.S. and many other governments, the United Nations, and specialized demining NGOs have a tremendous record of achievement. But we have not done it alone. We could not have done it without the support and sacrifice of people and organizations like Rotary.

Everyone here tonight recognizes that civil society has a role in making our world a safer place; and we are proud of our partnership program with nearly 50 organizations. This public-private model of partnership engages the private sector, raises awareness and brings additional resources from compassionate citizens directly to the mine-affected areas of greatest need around the world.

I am pleased to say that Rotary was one of the first organizations to become involved in our partnership program. The Rotarian magazine for June tells the story of many of their activities. If you have not read it yet, please do. You will see that through Operation LMS, the Jaipur Foot, and numerous other localized programs, Rotarians have provided prosthetic and rehabilitation services to landmine survivors in Africa, Central America and Southeast Asia. Rotary Clubs have also raised thousands of dollars for mine clearance in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Southeast Asia. Rotary Clubs have funded landmine risk education programs and built schools in communities after the landmines have been removed.

Rotarians have participated in the *Night of a Thousand Dinners*, which supports the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign. Naples Sunset Rotary has hosted two dinners in the last two years with the help of the Golden Gate Club in 2002. I know your leadership would like to see each area of the district host a dinner in November.

And as you know, following a major landmine conference in Seattle, Washington, sponsored by Rotary District 5030 and Zones 23/24, and the State Department in late 2002, Rotarians drafted a Landmine Resolution. Just this year, they officially formed a Fellowship of Rotarians for Mine Action. I was delighted to hear that several clubs in District 6960 have achieved 100% participation in this Fellowship, and that Governor Jim would like this to be the first district to achieve 100% participation. I encourage all of you to learn more about the Fellowship and related activities in the run-up to the Rotary International Conference in Chicago next June. Meanwhile, we should all visit the Rotary Landmine Website, www.rotariansformineaction.org.

I can't tell you how much I and my colleagues at the State Department appreciate your interest and participation. We all know the tremendous work Rotary has done on polio and other humanitarian problems. But I am convinced that humanitarian mine action is a natural issue for this great organization. This is a problem that can be solved in years, not decades, if we dedicate ourselves to the task.

In recent years, we have seen countries like El Salvador, Costa Rica and Djibouti, and Kosovo Province become mine safe; several more are within a year or two of achieving this status. In ten years, we aim to cut in half or more the number of seriously mine-affected countries shown on the map behind.

And so, on behalf of President Bush and Secretary Powell, I thank you for your participation in this important effort. Together, with Rotary as our partner, we are clearing a path to a safer, more peaceful and more prosperous world. Thank you very much.

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