

Reception Honoring Grapes for Humanity

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action
Benjamin Franklin Room, U.S. Department of State
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Thank you for that introduction. Good evening.

In my capacity as the Special Representative, I've recently had occasion to provide remarks for several mine action events at various locations. But, given the press of events here in Washington, I could only deliver those remarks by videotape. So I am doubly delighted to be with you this evening, not only to thank you in person for coming and to honor you for your support for mine action -- but to have an opportunity to personally savor your good company and the fine Beringer Vineyards wines featured tonight.

Let me add to Jim's greetings by again thanking Grapes for Humanity's co-founders, Arlene Willis and Tony Aspler, for inspiring this evening and for being such inspirational people.

I also thank our other partners in humanitarian mine action, Bobby Muller, President of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, and Michael Lundquist, Director of the Polus Center for Social and Economic Development, for coming here to testify to Grapes for Humanity's good works and to help us celebrate this Canadian charitable foundation's launch of its U.S. arm.

The U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program, which encompasses all three pillars of mine action -- mine clearance, mine risk education, and mine survivors assistance -- in some 40 countries, is dedicated to mitigating the threat and after-effects of landmines and other explosive remnants of war to innocent civilians. Our partnership program, headed by Jim Lawrence, is set up to foster the involvement of civil society in this worthy cause.

As Arlene, Tony, Bobby, Michael, and others in this room well know, mine action is more than the sum of the three pillars that I mentioned. Landmines, as well as unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war, place a tremendous burden on developing societies. Landmines and their deadly cousins are often a feature of crisis areas, where political repression, lawlessness, and patterns of violence take hold, resulting in hunger, poverty, and economic deprivation. Therefore mine action must serve as a basic element of post-conflict reconstruction and national reconciliation.

Iraq is an example of a country in which humanitarian mine action is being included in such reconstruction and reconciliation. The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, which I head, is making a major contribution to a national mine action plan for Iraq, to include funding, technical expertise, and the deployment of our Quick Reaction Demining Force.

Late last year, even before hostilities commenced, the State Department began supporting humanitarian mine action in northern Iraq where the inhabitants remain at risk from the landmines laid by their own former so-called rulers.

We know that a well thought out mine action program for all of Iraq is vital to enabling international relief to reach people in former zones of conflict. And of course a well-designed and executed mine action program helps lay the foundation for these innocent civilians and their children to resume normal lives. As I speak, officers from my Bureau have already deployed to Iraq to help this become a reality.

Let me return to tonight's theme and mention some of the good work in which Grapes for Humanity as well as our mutual friends -- the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and the Polus Center -- have already engaged in other mine affected countries.

Grapes for Humanity's focus is on mine survivors assistance. This charitable foundation has a sensible, straightforward way of operating that I commend. It:

- identifies a worthy project;
- sends representatives to perform due diligence to ensure the project meshes with Grapes for Humanity's goals;
- establishes a monetary target to assist the project; then
- successfully fund raises to help bring the project to fruition.

Grapes for Humanity's track record and choice of effective projects to date has been superb.

With the generous sponsorship of Beringer Vineyards, Grapes for Humanity raised \$50,000 to help the Polus Center with its Walking Unidos prosthetic outreach center in Leon, Nicaragua. Grapes for Humanity teamed up with the Polus Center again to help fund the establishment of the Vida Nueva prosthetic outreach center in Choluteca, Honduras. Vida Nueva -- New Life -- opened its doors in February of this year.

By the way, the Polus Center's annual gala dinner on March 12 was one of those events where I delivered a speech by videotape rather than in person. Michael, I am delighted that we are now in the same room so that I can personally express my gratitude to you, your staff, and all of the Polus Center's supporters for your valuable work. And I thank Grapes for Humanity for working so closely with Michael and his team.

Grapes for Humanity has also successfully collaborated with another one of our partners that was with us from the start in 1997 when we developed our unique humanitarian mine action public-private partnership program. I am talking about the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation -- veterans of war, and veterans of peace-building.

In July 2001, Grapes for Humanity raised the money needed for the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation to perform extensive renovations on its patient dormitory at its Kien Khleang National Rehabilitation Center in Phnom Penh. These renovations are protecting the patients -- men, women and children maimed by landmines and other weapons of war -- from monsoons and other extremes of Cambodia's climate, and assisting in their recovery.

Now, Grapes for Humanity aims to help the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation with its income generation and physical rehabilitation project for very poor, war-disabled Cambodian peasants in a town in northern Cambodia. This successful project is enabling war-injured Cambodians to weave silk from which they can make a productive living and reintegrate with their society.

Bobby, I thank you and your staff at the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation for all of your good, creative work in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world that are also infested by landmines and unexploded ordnance.

I have spoken long enough. Let me close by again thanking you all for your efforts to make our world a better and safer place and for gathering at the State Department this evening to celebrate Grapes for Humanity's success. Now I am pleased to give the floor to Arlene Willis.

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