

## The Humanitarian Demining Program

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### 1. The U.S. Government's Humanitarian Demining Program

The U.S. Government's Humanitarian Demining Program seeks to relieve human suffering while promoting U.S. interests. Our objectives are to reduce civilian casualties, create conditions for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes, reinforce an affected country's political and economic stability, and encourage international cooperation and participation.

Over the past decade, the United States committed \$600 million to mine action initiatives, including research and development. The Department of State accounts for approximately one-third of that total, including over \$180 million in Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related activities (NADR) funds since 1997.

Since 1993, the United States has established humanitarian demining programs in 44 countries, and we expect additional countries to benefit from these programs in the future.

In sum, the U.S. Humanitarian Demining Program has been a success in terms of reducing the rate of landmine casualties, the effectiveness of mine awareness programs, the amount of land cleared and restored to productive use, the number of people returned to their homes, and the number of landmine victims receiving assistance.

### 2. Afghanistan

Since FY 1993, the United States has provided over \$35 million to support humanitarian demining action efforts in Afghanistan, such as mine awareness instruction, demining training, and mine detection and clearance operations.

In the current Fiscal Year, the United States is providing \$7 million in mine action assistance. Key programs include:

- A direct grant of \$3.2 million to HAL Trust, a U.S. registered/UK based NGO, to clear landmines from such priority sites as roads, key infrastructure, residential areas, and other sites used by the organizations conducting humanitarian demining.
- Approximately \$3.1 million to RONCO, a U.S. commercial demining organization, to provide equipment so that local Afghan demining NGOs will be able to restore the full tempo of mine clearance operations around the country.
- A grant of about \$300,000 to UNICEF to fund mine risk education initiatives to be implemented by Save the Children, an American NGO. Save the Children will subcontract with several Afghan NGOs to disseminate the mine awareness messages.

U.S. assistance to Afghanistan is coordinated through the Mine Action Program Afghanistan (MAPA), which has provided mine awareness instruction to more than seven million people. The mine awareness instruction, coupled with mine detection and mine clearance operations have reduced landmine and unexploded ordnance casualties in Afghanistan by an estimated 50% over the last 3 or 4 year period to some 200 a month in 2001.

I cite these statistics not to suggest that we are content with the status quo; on the contrary. The Afghan people face a humanitarian threat of crisis proportions from landmines. However, I hope it is clear that the United States has a serious, longstanding and long-term effort underway, in concert with other governments, agencies, and private organizations, to help the people and Government of Afghanistan address and, in time, surmount the problem, just as we do in 37 other countries around

the world.

That is our commitment, and it reflects the support of the Congress and the American people. For which, in no small part, we have these distinguished Senators to thank for their leadership on the issue.

3. S. 1777, "The International Disability and Victims of Landmines, Civil Strife and Warfare Assistance Act of 2001"

Finally, please allow me one moment to discuss the legislation we have heard discussed here today, S. 1777.

As the sponsors of this and the companion House legislation, as well as Her Majesty Queen Noor have made clear, victims assistance is a very important dimension of addressing the humanitarian landmine problem. I applaud the thoughtful and serious attention being paid to the complex challenge of assisting victims.

As with any proposed law, the Executive Branch looks very carefully at the specifics, and the Administration has two particular concerns with the legislation as it is structured.

First, because there are no new funds to support survivors' assistance in S. 1777, we are very concerned that any funding for these initiatives might come at the direct expense of our vitally needed mine action initiatives which are funded under the State Department's Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related (NADR) program.

I am sure none of us here would want survivors' assistance funding to come at the expense of demining and mine awareness, which are our principal tools to prevent these terrible incidents in the first place.

An effort to fund landmine victim assistance as S. 1777 proposes would also compete with the Leahy War Victims Fund for finite resources. So we do not want to jeopardize successful long-term programs already in existence, or impair the initiatives we are already planning in the mine action area.

Second, the bill would mandate creation of a new interagency mechanism; and we are very satisfied that our existing process is quite effective in managing our programs. We now have a very successful Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) Subgroup on Humanitarian Mine Action.

As specific issues about landmine victim assistance arise, the procedure for the PCC would be to call upon all the relevant agencies and departments to reach a consensus. These can include the Veteran's Administration, the Department of Education, and the Center for Disease Control.

Conclusion

The Administration remains supportive of the intent of the legislation to gain focus on the issue. As I hope my remarks have demonstrated, the Administration is firmly committed to our mine action programs, including those providing assistance to landmine victims as well as their families.

We look forward to working with everyone in this room who shares our interest and concern in these issues to move our program forward.

[End]