Reducing the Threat of Landmines for Kosovo's Children

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HELP ON THE WAY...

with lottery clubs and some of our companies in Slovenia have already sent some money to the Trust. I think the future of demining, especially in this region, is now the private sector. With countries, there are other political parts of the world which are more interesting for them and they will go and send their money somewhere else, but [we would like] to establish the local economy so that it could be more able to [donate] to the Trust fund. The main thing for 2000 is the private sector.

The donors' partnership with ITF is important. The most recent donor conference was in October 1999, and they will continue as ITF's work progresses. "We are planning to have another one [donor conference] maybe in October or November of this year. That's when we show the donors where we are and what we are doing. There is another body [that is] very important, it's the so-called advisory board. We can also call it the board of donors, so all donors who want to, of course, can have their seats. I have another advisory board meeting in the end of February when I will present the program for 2000 and the report for 1999."

Cimperšek has a vision for BIH for Slovenia, and for the future of ITF. He hopes that the Trust will lead to others like it in landmined countries around the world. "I think that establishing the ITF was quite good, maybe not in the start, they didn't believe that it was a good idea because of the regional approach. The regional approach is probably, not just in demining but also in other parts of business, better than worldwide. I can say in the end that we are very happy that we have such good donor countries in the Trust fund, [such as] the United States, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and Canada. They have helped us get more funds and they support our approach in the Balkans. I think that [the ITF] model could be used somewhere else, not that ITF would work somewhere else, but that approach with the country who can do something, who doesn't have [landmine] problems. Otherwise, you have the problem where you spend all your money in your country and then forget the others. I think that's the approach for the world and for the future."

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UNICEF started mine-awareness activities in Kosovo February 1998. At that time the threat was perceived to be the result of the indiscriminate planting of landmines. The high rate of injuries among children and youth indicated UNICEF's need to target children and their parents. Children and youth are especially at risk because of their natural inquisitiveness and risk-taking behavior.

Initially, mine awareness started in the camps and targeted the refugees, who were in preparation for their return home. Mine-awareness messages were developed using posters and leaflets. Immediately after the signing of the peace treaty, the Transitional Reparation phase was initiated by UNMCC, specifying safety behavior. Local media were involved in disseminating this material, along with UNICEF-trained teachers and community workers in mine-awareness education. Surveys showed that this initial campaign was successful with refugees well aware of mines and behavior altering steps so as not to become a landmine victim.

While there are some common elements in mine-affected communities throughout the world,
Effective campaigns are those that are adapted to local needs, culture and traditions. After conducting fieldwork and information about behaviors and victims, mine-awareness programs can be tailored for target groups. A monitoring and evaluation component in part of all operations ensures that UNICEF missions in schools and makes sure children are being mine-awareness sessions, where needs-assessment surveys are conducted and external evaluations are all scheduled.

UNICEF's mine-awareness coordinator in Kosovo, feels that while it is easy to identify successes, the Child-to-Child Program has proved popular with staff, education authorities and children. This unique project uses a child-to-child strategy. Children ages 9 through 14 are trained to disseminate information about the dangers of mines and UXO to other groups, younger children and their families. Games and other interactive approaches are used. Children are encouraged to create their own communication tools so that they can pass this information along easily to children and adults.

Another success that Dowd mentions is the easy startup of UNMACE. "Unfortunately, one of the main challenges has been the number of agencies coming to Kosovo, and not going through UNMACE directly where they are working. This makes coordination of efforts very difficult. The UNMACE produces a map indicating where organizations are working. Dowd also mentions the lack of accurate casualty data as being a concern. Without a proper evaluation of the effectiveness of the mine-education campaign, the drop in casualty figures cannot be attributed to it. "Assessment will be carried out in the spring.

Predictions are that casualties will drop over the winter period and then increase in spring when there will be more movement, and farmers and villagers will be anxious to get back in their fields. An assessment after spring will be particularly important," said Dowd.

The World Health Organization is in the process of establishing a comprehensive data collection system for mines/UXO-victims in Kosovo, which involves the ICRG, and local hospitals and UNICEF to the UNICEF states those children below the age of 14 account for 30 percent of landmine injuries, and young adults between 15-24 are another 41 percent of injuries. Mine-awareness campaigns have been especially challenging. The educational system within Kosovo has been devastated, with many schools vandalized or destroyed and an undetermined number of teachers injured or killed. In addition, landmines laid during the conflict, cluster bombs, UXO and the possibility of booby traps left by leaving combatants, create an especially dangerous environment for children. A number of schools were used by the military and have been left with mines, UXO and booby traps, which hinder the repair and reconstruction process to many cases children are not aware of the danger. One boy, looking for books to read at a school, was injured. A mine/UXO-assessment has been conducted and organizations have been tasked with clearing processes, but this is a lengthy process.

A rapid assessment by UNICEF in an area west and south of Pristina, showed that out of 13 schools inspected, five were demolished, four were burned, and one was suspected of being booby trapped. Only three were deemed safe and usable. The children's agency will provide educational kits or school-in-a-box, which contain both classroom and student supplies. The kits also will help to mobilize teachers, including those whom UNICEF is working with in refugee camps.

Currently, The Dodoma National Puppet Theater is organizing a puppet show, which will promote mine/UXO awareness for children. They intend to start their puppet tour in areas of high mine awareness priority.

UNICEF has dealt people to the danger of landmines and will intensity mine-awareness activities in Kosovo itself. The effort is focusing on providing mine/UXO-awareness educational materials in local languages to primary schools and communities. The development of resources to promote human and child rights and ensure local reconciliation efforts through peace education will also be explored.

The agency expressed hope that by restoring primary education, it will help Kosovo's children have a tangible sense that normal life can and will go on.

UNICEF's Children's Advocate, Jody Williams, and Canadian Ambassador for Mine Action, Jill E. Sinclair, visited Kosovo on June 30 to July 1, 1999, to highlight UNICEF's mine-awareness activities there and to appeal for an intensification of demining in the war-torn province. "The risk presented by mines and unexploded ordnance in Kosovo is extremely high," Williams said. "Children are particularly in danger and many have already suffered severe injury or death because they have inadvertently stepped on these lethal and illegal weapons of war."

UNICEF's integrated mine-awareness education campaign, involves:

- Training teachers, social workers and volunteers in landmine-awareness skills.
- Dissemination of mine-awareness posters.
- Use of mobile theatre groups, radio broadcasts and other means of public education.
- Distribution of aid material in areas of specific need.
- Assistance to the UNHCR in landmine awareness projects in refugee camps.

"Landmines everywhere are a scourge of innocence and of children in particular," said Williams. "I hope the trip to Kosovo will make it clear that an urgent priority must be placed on demining, and that concrete steps must be taken quickly to protect all children, women and others in the war-torn province," said Sinclair.

UNICEF has been appointed as the U.N. focal point for mine-awareness education. They have developed International Guidelines to promote effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluating of mine-awareness programs. UNICEF and its partners have distributed more than one million posters and leaflets in Kosovo.

Dowd said, "The overall goal for the program is to change people's behavior and reduce the casualty rate. Specifically we want to continue to incorporate mine-awareness education into school curriculum using a consultative process with local education authorities."