Exchange for Peace

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Prevention:
• Decline in the number of landmine incidents, from 169 in 1999 to four in 2003.
• Training of 6,190 school children to spread awareness messages.
• Distribution of leaflets, posters and 60,000 booklets.
• Conducting of 39 monthly MRE sessions.

Assistance to Mine Victims:
• 30 mine victims and 30 members of mine victim families have received vocational training in English, computers, drawing and videography.
• Nine have found work doing wedding videos and photography in their villages.
• 10 others work in beekeeping.
• A revolving loan fund has been created to set up sustainable supply for victims.
• Local authorities are paying more attention to mine victims, including distribution of small grants to 18 families who lost houses and property during the conflict.
• Logistics assistance is being provided, including information on rehabilitation and transportation to medical appointments.

Recommendations for Future Action in Albania

Based on the analysis of the current mine problems in Albania and the results of previous mine action activities, the following suggestions are recommended for Albanian mine action in the future:

• Anti-mine committees should be trained to write proposals to win funding that would ensure the sustainability of the projects, and that the community-based organisations should be strengthened.
• Home-based work is a good alternative in mine victims and training should be established for animal husbandry, carpentry, plumbing, marketing and handicrafts.
• Victims who have moved to urban centres need to be trained.
• Children who cannot go to school need care.

New projects should be established for beekeeping and cattle breeding.

The established system of raising awareness needs to be strengthened so the community can be completely responsible for solving its problems.

Anti-mine committees are a strong institution for community development, and could be used to set up a revolving fund for mine victims and the community.

The Albanian government should be lobbied to include mine victims in the peace process.

More concern should be held to help spread messages about behavior change.

Former mined areas need to be restored.

Since 2001, UNICEF has provided technical support to the Albanian Mine Action Executive (AMAE), the body that coordinates all mine action in Albania. The AMAE is responsible for ensuring the clearance and certification of the demining process. The National MRE strategy was implemented in 2001–2002, followed by a CARE survey on mine awareness and a workshop to update the strategy. It calls for completing mine clearance of high- and medium-priority areas by 2006 (low-priority areas are not inhabited and will be cleared in coming years), with a modest budget of $5 million (U.S.). This would make Albania the second post-conflict country in the region free of mines and UXO.

Exchange for Peace

A project organized by the office of the National Councilor Roland Wiederkehr (Member of the Swiss Parliament), Exchange for Peace brings young people from all over the world together to discuss and share their experiences and hopes for a brighter future. The theme of this year’s event was landmines and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field of mine action.

by Kimberly Kian, MAG

Various forms of anterior armor slowly swept over our land as an armoured display of arms at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich. In this exhibit, dozens of half-complete suits of armor dug from invisible wires in the form of large mobiles, hanging from the ceiling of a large room. “I cannot take this anymore, would you like to come see some other exhibits with me?” whispered Safana Hadil Al-Adli, a young Iraqi woman who works for an Italian NGO. As we walked out of the exhibit, she said, “I could not stand it any longer in there, they looked like ghosts, the ghosts of dead soldiers. It is a horrible display.” We looked at one piece of 17th-century Swiss poetry in silence. Safana was right about the exhibit: the displayed arms were so disturbing, the memory of the terrible consequences of war, and the problems faced by those involved in mine action are undeniable.

By the ancient or modern, remnants of war are a serious problem for all people. While watching those old weapons wheel about the room, I thought about little about the modern explosive remnants of war lurking beneath the heels of so many in the world. Safana’s sad words made me think of the普通of the mainland China faced by the Chinese people. Having recently written an article about the need for victim assistance in Iraq, I felt that I knew a little about the war and make way for a talk. I was not aware in front of their vehicle, it rolled over an anti-tank mine and exploded. The pair were returning from a trip to the northern rural areas where they taught refugees who did not have access to television or radio about the dangers of landmines. Their efforts have helped immensely in the prevention of mine accidents among these people, and especially with their children.

He showed me photos of demine in Sri Lanka using staffs of bamboo for prodding and warping very little, if any, personal protective equipment (PPE). Demining efforts in Sri Lanka are currently frustrated by failed negotiations between Sri Lankan government and the rebel group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Krishan explained that the LTTE is thinking about signing the Geneva Call, but he had little hope they would do so, since their demands for signing included cooperation from the Sri Lankan government. Without a binding agreement to stop the use of landmines, the LTTE continues to this day to place mines in the northern part of Sri Lanka. A colleague of Krishan, explained how many of the victims of landmines in Sri Lanka are unable to get prostheses because they are not manufactured within the country. Most of these victims are uninformed children who play in the jungle.

Efforts in Cambodia

In the basement carafita of the Cambodian Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) headquarters in Geneva, I was able to speak with two participants from Cambodia. They work for Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Cambodia, which focuses mostly on victim assistance and humanitarian work around the world. Led by a young man named Jaffna, JRS Cambodia helps victims by providing them with training for the production of handicrafts and by visiting the homes of disabled victims to provide them with food assistance. JRS also goes out into rural villages and educates children and adults about the dangers of landmines.

Chetara Seng, a long-time worker with JRS, shared a story about a local farmer who lives alone with his people in his fields. One week, there was a celebration in his village and his workers went to their respective homes to celebrate. Without waiting for his farmer and municipal plow the land alone for the first time. As he was plowing, he drove the tractor over a part of the land usually plowed by his workers. His tractor rolled over an AT mine and exploded. A chest cavity was all that was left of his body.

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Association, UNICEF’s major local partner, has identified almost 200 mine-affected households with people who are unable to meet their basic needs. UNICEF is supporting the Mine Victims Association to:

• Undertake mine risk education activities in affected communities in 39 villages of Albania.
• Hold counseling sessions with children and other individuals traumatised during the conflict.
• Represent mine victims’ interests.
• Help mine victims with logistical support in getting medical help.
• Help lobby for support from donors. This lobbying has resulted in support from the U.S. State Department for a project aimed at socio-economic reintegration of mine victims through development of household animal breeding activities.

Mine risk education (MRE) continues in three northern districts, targeting communities and schools. The work is coordinated by associations committees, represented by mine-victims in each village in collaboration with peace activists and with local participation by women. These focus on community work in each village and are responsible for ensuring the safety of residents and the dissemination of information to keep the population informed about mine threats and mined areas.

The play in the village spread the mine awareness message by a nun. The committee also report to authoriites about incidents and minefields and monitor the presence of warning signs. The Mine Victims Association team introduces mine awareness counseling sessions with children and other people experiencing the stress of the war.

Major outcomes of the work include the following:

Despite the positive outcomes, many concerns still remain. The mined area is remote, so mine awareness counseling sessions are attended by a few children and other people who have actually been exposed to landmines. Education opportunities for mine victims are rare. Even when people are trained, there are few job opportunities. Even people without physical disabilities find it very difficult to get around because of poor infrastructure, and for mine victims, the situation is even worse. There are not enough social workers, doctors and other professionals to serve the area.

1 Exchange for Peace


72

continued on page 66
An Encounter in Caux

The most remarkable experience I had during the Exchange for Peace program as an American Jewish youth was meeting the people of Caux. In this community, I had the opportunity to meet a North Korean named Ho Chul Son. Born in Japan and having inherited his North Korean citizenship from his grandfather, this young man traveled to Switzerland with a Japanese NGO worker to speak about his efforts in Japan to establish a friendly Korean-Japanese relationship. Chul is hoping to start a youth camp that brings together and helps to establish relationships between Korean and Japanese teenagers. "The older generation carries too many hurts," he explained in Korean. "We must work with the younger generation to help build a better relationship."

As our conversation continued, we spoke about hopes for Korean reconstruction. My parents immigrated to the United States from South Korea and hold a strong distrust of North Koreans. However, I explained that to make peace, we need to work together. In Caux, where we were the only ones who spoke Korean, we learned to live in peace and unity with our own culture. We were one of the nations. Because of that encounter in Caux, we know that the people of North Korea were once the children of a fascist state and that a great future lies ahead. To make it possible, we must overcome the barriers and work together for a better world.