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News Brief

James Lawrence Appointed Director

On 8 May 2011, James (Jim) F. Lawrence was appointed Director of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA). Although this is a new **official** title for Lawrence, he is no stranger to the State Department or PM/WRA. He started his career with the State Department in 1980 as the Executive Director of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, a program that annually admits 70,000 refugees to enter the United States and supports millions of refugees internationally. From 1998 to 2008 he worked on a number of different mine-action programs, serving as the Director of the Office of Mine Action Initiatives and Partnerships for the majority of that period. For the last two years, he has served as the Acting Director of PM/WRA.

When asked about his plans and goals as Director, Lawrence said he intends to continue on the path set out by his predecessors while at the same time, adapting to the many changes in the field of mine action. "The land-mine problem has not disappeared, but it has reached a plateau. Several countries have declared themselves mine-safe and more will attain that status in the next few years," he said. "My priorities are to continue with a strategic approach to the execution of our programs and the allocation of our resources. In the current environment of declining resources, we need to make our budgets go further even while our mandate is expanding to areas such as the destruction of small arms/light weapons and MANPADS, and stockpile security."

He also emphasized the importance he places on empowering local populations to deal with their own mine-action issues. "Our strategy going forward will continue to focus on local capacity-building with the final aim of turning the program over to local experts."

Lawrence made a point to comment on the personal satisfaction he gets from his job, both from the work itself and the exceptional people in the mine-action community as well as the enjoyment he is experiencing in leading his own team. "I love being able to hire extraordinarily talented people and watch them succeed." In his role as Director, Jim Lawrence looks forward to continuing to support worthwhile conventional weapons destruction projects and programs that will make the world a safer place for everyone. 

