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## News Briefs

News Brief

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## News Briefs

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### 1. Conference Discusses Women in Armed Groups, Human Rights

In November 2005, Geneva Call and the Program for the Study of International Organization(s) from the Geneva-based Graduate Institute of International Studies held a workshop in Ethiopia entitled "Women in Armed Opposition Groups in Africa and the Promotion of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights."

The workshop sought ways to strengthen international humanitarian and human-rights law within African armed groups and their political groups. Thirty-nine female leaders from armed opposition groups and civil society from countries currently involved in conflict or recently involved in the post-conflict recovery process came together for the conference. The workshop also sought to increase the international community's understanding of and ability to work with African armed groups.

Four topics were discussed in working groups during the workshop:

- Humanitarian law
- Human rights law
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
- Transition into governance roles

The final report from the conference, which presents information and analyses that came out of these four thematic working groups, is available in English and will soon be available in French. The report can be downloaded at <http://www.genevacall.org/resources/testi-publications/gc-23nov05-women.pdf>. If you would like a printed copy of the report, e-mail [info@genevacall.org](mailto:info@genevacall.org).

### 2. "Devil's Garden" Cleared of Explosive Debris

The thousands of landmines, unexploded and abandoned ordnance, and booby traps located in minefields around Bagram, Afghanistan, have been successfully cleared. During the effort, two deminers were accidentally killed by mines booby-trapped to hinder clearance.

Termed the "Devil's Garden" because the area was considered to have the most dangerous minefields in the world, the land is now being used by 72,000 refugees and thousands of internally displaced persons for agriculture, habitation and commerce.

The HALO Trust conducted clearance of the minefields with financial support from the U.S. Department of

State. Clearance operations began in December 2001 and cost nearly US\$5 million. Additional funding was provided by Roots of Peace and the governments of the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland, Japan, the Netherlands and Norway.

### **3. U.S. Pledges Millions for Demining Efforts Abroad**

The Organization of American States will receive nearly US\$1.9 million in grant money from the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. The money will support mine-removal efforts in Chile, Honduras and Nicaragua.

A report by the OAS said more than \$1.45 million of the pledged money will support humanitarian-demining efforts in Nicaragua conducted by the OAS Mine Action Program. Nicaragua is the most heavily mined country in Central America, according to the OAS. The mines are a result of intense fighting as part of armed conflict in the 1980s. The OAS estimates landmine emplacement in Nicaragua totals 146,000 mines.

More than \$280,000 from the grant will be used for victim-assistance efforts in Nicaragua and Honduras, providing survivors with rehabilitation services and vocational training in their communities. Another \$112,000 of the pledge will assist Chilean officials in implementing that country's landmine-action plan. Chile hopes to complete all humanitarian-demining projects by 2011.

The U.S. State Department also announced the awarding of 31 grants, totaling over \$2.1 million, to 20 nongovernmental organizations for the clearance of landmines, mine-risk education, victim-assistance programs and related research projects. These grants extend the Department's 2006 budget of \$78.5 million for humanitarian mine action. Some of the organizations and projects receiving funding are:

- \$74,677 to Catholic Relief Services to teach primary school children in Vietnam about the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance.
- \$75,000 to Clear Path International for agricultural and vocational training for mine survivors in Battambang, Cambodia; and \$60,000 for a survivor-assistance project in Vietnam to be matched by private funds.
- \$65,140 to the Mine Action Information Center at James Madison University to create a guidebook that integrates UXO and mine casualty data into national mine-action programs, \$61,254 to produce an adaptive technology catalog for survivors of ERW, and \$45,371 to study the degree of prevalence of U.S.-origin landmines and UXO in mine-affected countries.
- \$55,000 to Cranfield University (U.K.) to monitor mine- and UXO-victim data; \$45,000 to identify problems with and recommend solutions for Angola's mine-action planning; and \$40,000 for the development of better quality-assurance/-control indicators in mine action.
- \$63,200 to the Humpty Dumpty Institute to expand a survivor-assistance mushroom-growing project in Vietnam; and \$54,550 to identify mine-affected countries that would benefit from commoditizing surplus U.S. foods to fund mine clearance.
- \$69,214 to the Marshall Legacy Institute for support Children Against Mines Program (CHAMPS), teaching American children about the global landmine problem and raising funds for mine-detecting dogs in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and \$55,927 to provide six MDDs to a mine-affected country (yet to be determined) currently receiving assistance from the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program.
- \$236,300 to Jordan's National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation to support MRE in Jordan.
- \$145,600 to UNICEF for MRE programs in the Rasht Valley and Badakhshan province of Tajikistan.

According to DOS, the United States has provided about \$1 billion since 1993 to reduce the threat of landmines globally. That amount is between one-third and one-half of all mine-action investments by donor nations worldwide.

For a full list of programs and organizations receiving grant monies, visit <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/69660.htm>.

### **4. Australia Increases Aid to Middle East**

The Australian government recently announced it will increase humanitarian aid for relief and recovery

efforts in the Middle East by AU\$3 million (US\$2.2 million). This will bring the total funding by Australia to the region to AU\$10.5 million.

Four U.N. organizations will receive AU\$2 million (US\$1.9 million) directly because they are actively involved in immediate recovery efforts in Lebanon.

- The United Nations Development Programme will receive AU\$500,000 (US\$372,056) for Quick Delivery-High Impact Initiative, a high-impact fund that helps repair infrastructure and make other improvements to the restoration of civil functions.
- UNICEF and the World Health Organization will each receive AU\$500,000 (US\$372,056) in funding for medical and health programs.
- Finally, the U.N. Mine Action Service will receive AU\$500,000 for the removal of unexploded ordnance.

UNICEF will also receive AU\$1 million for emergency health services in the Palestinian territories.

Further reconstruction assistance will be forthcoming as the governments of Australia and Lebanon coordinate efforts.

## **5. Sweden Supports OAS**

The government of Sweden provided US\$800,000 to the Organization of American States to support demining work in Nicaragua. The grant will also support a mine-risk education program, "Safe Step without Mines," and rehabilitation/reintegration services for landmine victims.

Operations made possible by the grant from the Swedish International Development Agency will be coordinated through the OAS Mine Action Program. The donation will advance the Nicaraguan National Demining Plan by about 90 percent.

The OAS reports that, in 1990, more than 550,000 Nicaraguans lived within five kilometers (three miles) of a landmine-infested area; currently, fewer than 45,000 people live under those conditions.

The OAS is considering an expansion of rehabilitation and social reintegration programs because of strong financial support from nations such as Canada, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United States. If enlarged, the programs would not only serve greater numbers in Nicaragua but also neighboring Honduras.

## **6. Death Valley Challenge to Raise \$100K**

Mines Advisory Group, in partnership with CEIA USA, will sponsor a 263-mile (423-kilometer) bike trek across Death Valley, USA. Event organizers hope to raise nearly £40,000 (US\$74,000) to support mine-action efforts around the globe.

From March 4 to March 11, 2007, 40 participants will travel and cycle to raise money and awareness. The registration fee for the event is only £175 (US\$325), but each participant is asked to raise £2,750 (US\$5,100) in sponsorships, half of which will cover the cost of running the event. Included in trek costs is London-to-Las Vegas airfare, accommodations, nearly all meals, the use of bicycles, and other sundry expenses.

For more information on this trip, visit [www.magclearsmines.org](http://www.magclearsmines.org).

## **7. Finding More than Honey with Bees**

Buried within the US\$468 billion appropriations bill for the U.S. Department of Defense's fiscal 2007 budget is \$5 million for a new military tracking system—honey bees. The project would train honey bees for a variety of military and commercial uses, including finding landmines and other buried explosives.

Researchers at the University of Montana and Montana State University claim the bees can be monitored via a laser-tracking system. With further development, the bees may be able to detect more than just landmines and buried explosives—researchers believe the bees may also be capable of finding

methamphetamine labs, dead bodies and other hard-to-detect items.

Still, the primary focus of the honey-bee experimentation is on the discovery of explosives because bees are very attuned to the scent of TNT and similar material. Recognizing the acute sensitivity of bees' antennae to different molecular compounds, scientists have studied the bees' reaction to the scent of food and, through a Pavlovian technique, trained the bees to react positively toward the scent of dangerous materials. Funding for honey-bee programs is difficult to secure, and the technology still is not in a marketable form.

### **8. Burmese Militant Group Signs Deed of Commitment**

The Chin National Front in Burma (Myanmar) and its militant wing, the Chin National Army, signed Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment July 31, 2006, in Geneva. The group has pledged to a total ban on the use of anti-personnel landmines.

Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment provides a unique outlet for non-state actors not usually included in the codification of international law, even international humanitarian law. The organization aims to engage NSAs in following international humanitarian norms.

The CNF and CNA were founded in 1988 to battle for the restoration of democracy in the form of a federal union in Burma. A CNF-adopted military code of conduct based on the Geneva Conventions has been in use since 1997, but this code only calls for a limited ban on landmines.

Numerous other armed resistance groups and even the Burmese government use landmines in the country as part of continuing internal conflicts. Many of the mines have been emplaced in contentious border areas, rendering land uninhabitable and displacing thousands of people, who cross the border into India and Bangladesh to find a safe place to live and work.

More information on Geneva Call and its Deed of Commitment is available at [www.genevacall.org](http://www.genevacall.org).

### **9. Jaipur Foot Flown to Lebanon**

Under the auspices of the United Nations, the Jaipur foot was recently flown to Lebanon so that doctors and technicians could provide prosthetic assistance to more than 20 landmine survivors. The recipients are victims of landmine blasts and, with the help of their new Jaipur foot, are now able to walk.

A popular prosthetic appendage, the Jaipur foot is lightweight, flexible and one of the most successful artificial limbs in production. The foot allows its recipient to walk, climb trees and even sit cross-legged. It is also particularly useful in the Indian and Muslim contexts because it is the only artificial foot that can be worn without a shoe. Users are able to enter temples or mosques without concern for offending religious sensibilities.

The prostheses and expertise have been provided by the Jaipur charity, Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti, which has organized assistance in several countries and helped over 16,000 victims by fitting them with the Jaipur foot.

### **10. Tissue-regeneration Research**

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency has awarded a US\$3.7 million grant to the University of Pittsburgh's McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine and a \$1.2 million grant to the University of Massachusetts Lowell. The grant money will fund research into the structure and functions of lost or damaged tissues.

Researchers are optimistic that the knowledge gained will advance studies into the possibility for tissue regeneration. The teams will investigate how tissues and cells in certain animals, like salamanders, allow for the complete regeneration of lost tissue. Researchers will begin the large, multi-center program by examining the cellular and molecular processes that allow for regeneration—while humans respond to injury with scar tissue, salamanders and similar animals develop progenitor cells that will eventually develop into specialized cells of bone, muscle, skin and nerves.

To a certain extent, humans already are capable to repairing damaged cells—liver and red blood cells self-renew—but are incapable of reforming whole limbs.

### **11. Landmines Affect Civilians and Military Forces**

Landmines in two of the most heavily mined countries in the world, Afghanistan and Iraq, pose a constant threat to local populations. In 2004, the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines cited 261 Iraqi injuries or deaths from landmines. In the same period, 895 Afghans were injured or killed by landmines.

The landmine contamination also seriously affects United States Armed Forces serving in the two countries. Since 2003, more than 100 United States soldiers and service members have been victims of landmines in Afghanistan and Iraq. A fact sheet prepared by the USCBL cited 75 American casualties in Iraq and 50 in Afghanistan since 2003. The accidents have resulted in 35 deaths total.

For a complete report and to view the fact sheet, visit [http://www.banminesusa.org/index\\_afghan.html](http://www.banminesusa.org/index_afghan.html).

### **12. To Walk the Earth in Safety Chronicles U.S. Mine-clearance Efforts**

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs recently published the sixth edition of *To Walk the Earth in Safety*, a comprehensive report on U.S. mine-action efforts. The report covers landmine action in 30 countries for fiscal years 2004 and 2005 by the interagency U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program.

Department officials announced that, owing in part to U.S. assistance, Costa Rica, Djibouti, Guatemala and Honduras would not appear in the report because they have become free from landmine impact. Attention is also paid to U.S. policy toward landmines and total U.S. contributions to landmine action, which exceeded \$1 billion.

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, divisions of the Department of Defense and U.S. Army, James Madison University's Mine Action Information Center and several in-country centers are profiled in the report. There is also coverage of the DOS Quick Reaction Demining Force, the only standing humanitarian-demining unit with worldwide deployment capabilities.

A PDF version of the sixth edition is available at <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/walkearth/2006>. To request a printed copy of *To Walk the Earth in Safety*, e-mail your complete mailing address and postal (or ZIP) code to John Stevens at [steveje@state.gov](mailto:steveje@state.gov).

### **13. Taliban Suspects Killed Emplacing Mines**

Four suspected Taliban terrorists died while emplacing landmines along roads in southern Afghanistan in late July. Three Taliban members reportedly blew themselves up in one incident as the landmine they were laying on a road in the Arghistan district of Kandahar province exploded.

In a separate and apparently unrelated incident, another Taliban member died when a mine being emplaced in Shah Wali Kot, a district north of Kandahar city, exploded unexpectedly.

While the former hard-line Islamic regime was deposed by Coalition Forces in 2003, supporters of the Taliban have recently increased attacks in southern regions of the country.

### **14. U.S. Provides Aid to Lebanon for Clearance of ERW**

The United States has provided more than US\$17 million in aid from the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program to rid Lebanon of landmines and explosive remnants of war since 1998. Since the onset of the recent conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, the United States has donated more than \$9 million in additional funding to clear persistent and newly developed hazards.

Funding will be provided by the following:

- The Department of Defense will provide \$5 million to the Department of State for humanitarian

demining—\$2.8 million will go to Mines Advisory Group and \$2.2 million will be dispersed by RONCO to the Lebanese Army Engineer Regiment's clearing of cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance in southern Lebanon.

- The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement at the DOS will authorize \$420,000 to MAG, an initial grant of \$30,000 to the United Nations Joint Logistics Centre for ERW data collection and mapping, and \$384,000 to RONCO for equipping two 25-person ERW detection teams.
- The Bureau of International Organization Affairs at the DOS will provide \$2 million to the United Nations Development Programme to continue the operations of UNDP-controlled clearance teams.
- The U.S. Agency for International Development will provide \$1.2 million to MAG for emergency unexploded ordnance and battle-area clearance.

## **15. Colombia Destroys Stockpile**

The Colombian Congress recently created the Colombian Mine Action Centre and the organization is already making great headway toward alleviating the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war.

With the help of funds from the European Union, CMAC will begin a Landmine Impact Survey in 2007. Work on the LIS will be difficult because domestic conflict continues to hamper humanitarian efforts, and the conditions for a regular LIS are not present. LIS coordinators must prepare to reduce the exceptional risks posed by active domestic conflict before beginning survey operations.

The Colombian Military has agreed to train three more demining platoons to increase the national demining capacity. Currently only one platoon is dedicated to humanitarian demining efforts. It has been difficult for military leaders to gain support for this activity because training for demining removes soldiers from combat zones.

The Colombian Air Force recently destroyed its remaining stockpile of training landmines (totaling about 100 mines), and the destruction of the remaining 786 landmines is planned for completion by the end of 2007.

## **16. Funding Shortfalls Exceed \$300 Million**

The recently released Portfolio of Mine Action Projects 2007 published startling figures concerning funding shortfalls for groups and organizations tackling the international threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance. More than 100 nongovernmental organizations, national authorities and United Nations agencies reported a total shortfall of US\$317.5 million for projects in 29 countries or territories.

The 2007 edition of the report reviews more than 300 proposals with a combined budget of \$429 million. Only \$111.7 million in funding for these proposals has been secured, leaving nearly 75 percent of these projects unfunded.

The Portfolio of Mine Action Projects is a joint publication of the U.N. Mine Action Service, U.N. Development Programme and UNICEF. The full text of the report can be accessed at <http://www.mineaction.org/downloads/1/Portfolio%20for%20emine%20bookmarked%20October%202005,%202006.pdf>.