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HELP ON THE WAY...

The Slovenian International Trust Fund for Demining

by Stephanie Schlosser

On the web page of The Slovenian International Trust Fund for Demining (ITF) there is an image that, at first glance, could be an advertisement for a toy store. The image is of a child's doll. She appears bright and happy, with red pigtails and yellow ribbons, and a sunny yellow dress. The doll's eyes glance playground-like to one side, as if she is about to join a group of similarly happy friends. Suddenly, the doll's face and body change. With web animation, the doll's right leg disappears along with her smile.

Then you remember, this is a website for ITF and its focus is demining. The doll herself, you realize, must be a landmine victim, happy one minute, and completely changed for the rest of her life the next. The image sticks in the mind.

ITF keeps the doll as a symbol of the many people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) who have been hurt by landmines. With the main goal of ridding BiH of its landmines thoroughly and quickly, ITF partners with organizations to help the rehabilitation of mine victims. In 1998, offering assistance to about 250 patients annually, the institution's program has two parts. The first is the rehabilitation of mine victims, which will include 25 patients from BiH per month. The second involves building up the program by educating doctors, specialists and technicians from BiH in demining, however, still remains ITF's central focus.

"Demining, really is the main problem in Bosnia because there is not enough money for resources and it's better to demine than just have a program for victim assistance," Cimpersek said. "In general, our policy is that not more than 15 percent of our funds will go for mine victim's assistance, leaving 85 percent to demining, but last year [in] all the programs not more than 10 percent of our money went to mine victim's assistance. There are a lot of victims in Bosnia, and we also work in Croatia. There are a lot of victims who need some kind of help but in general, it's the same as in the demining program; we have a memorandum signed with both entities in the Ministry of Health, so there are those patients who need to go to Slovenia and [those who] could be in Bosnia-Herzegovina. At least 40 percent of the program was in BiH, not outside of BiH. I think that's the right approach. To teach them we have some special courses for trainers, for those medical people in Slovenia or in BiH, so sooner or later, maybe five years, they will not need our help anymore.

"With a country like Slovenia, which finds itself deeply immersed in the mine problems at a neighboring country, there had to be minimal landmine problems in order for the country to act as Samaritan. Cimpersek explained the landmine history of Slovenia, "The experience [in demining] in Slovenia is quite long because we have had an experience from the first and from the second World War, and we have a group of experts who worked in disposal of munitions for, I think, 30 years. After the return of the Yugoslav army in 1991, they left a few [mines] in Slovenia, We had our so-called demining corporations in '92 and finished in '93. It was not a big operation, it was a small one, but of course we have some experience in mine clearance after 1991."

Even with some un-cleaned landmines of its own, Slovenia and ITF see their role in BiH as important and even seek to help other countries directly or by being a model.

"I think it's important for Slovenia, because 10 years ago we were together, to show the others, our former—we call it brothers—if that there is opportunity for them to be normal countries, to join Western Europe and Western countries in the world," Cimpersek said. "I think it's very important from a Slovenian point of view to show, because our role can be in Europe or just in the Balkans, that we can work to show new approaches to the Netherlands or the United Kingdom. We can go to the regions where we have experience. We speak their language, we have the same culture, religion and all of those things so it's important for us to work in the region. I think it was a very good decision of the Slovenian government to establish the Trust Fund and to help those of our former republic, which are now former Yugoslavia."

Moving forward is the plan for ITF, the Trust has planned to tap into the private sector for funds in the coming century.

"Our main thinking, our plan for 2000," Cimpersek said, "is to work with the private sector because last year our main goals were [to get donations] from countries. Now we are starting to work with the private companies, private donors. We have our own PR agency that works for us. I think they are quite successful. We have now some programs..."
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 es-

The ITF headquarters are located at The Training Center for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief near Ljubljana, Slovenia’s capital.

Photo © International Trust Fund

tablish 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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Mine victims receive treatment at the Slovenian Institute for Rehabilitation. The Center was activated in May 1998.

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