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The Impact of the Washington 2010 Conference

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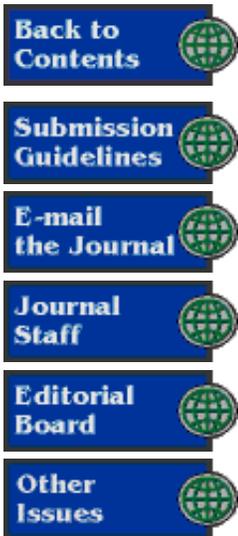
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The Journal of Humanitarian Demining

**From the
Director's
Desk**

The Impact of the Washington 2010 Conference

Dennis Barlow

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In late May, Washington D.C. played host to selected international dignitaries who gathered together to devise a global strategy for dealing with unexploded landmines. Great strides were made in world-wide coordination efforts. Many of these agreements were informal, some were regionally based (e.g., an African Demining sidebar session), and some were functionally oriented (e.g., a Victim Assistance sidebar session). But the exciting thing was that even in the midst of a gathering that had to pay extreme heed to international political sensitivities, it--like Copenhagen and Ottawa--became the forum and stimulus for real and discernible progress.

We would like to tip our hats to the delegates from diverse donor nations, international organizations, for-profit firms, and non-government organizations; who to a large degree checked their political agendas at the door, and engaged in frank and open discussion. We feel the plenary sessions, as well as the several ad hoc sessions, and refreshingly focused sidebar meetings, helped to define problems and suggest solutions, or at least methodologies, in a very speedy and decisive manner.

One aspect of the conference, which we would like to examine here, is the impact of presentations made by American policy decision-makers. Often, indeed almost universally, meetings of this sort tend to result in policy statements, which if not retreads of earlier pronouncements, are bland or still statements of the obvious or the sweet by-and-by. Not here. Statements by the President, Secretary of State, and the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided the basis for a very aggressive and organized U.S. government approach to global humanitarian demining.

President Clinton's statement was short, but carried a clear and powerful message. He not only espoused a more coordinated global effort, but promised the continued strong participation of the U.S. He endorsed the concept of bringing the landmine problem under control by the end of the next decade, and concluded by calling for greater levels of effort and resources in order to help solve the landmine problem by the year 2010.

Secretary of State Albright developed the concept of coordination, which President Clinton introduced. She identified the following elements as necessary to build a global demining strategy: awareness, commitment, resources,

coordination, and leadership. She also spelled out some key component parts of some of these elements, stressing the need for accurate landmine facts, an efficient donor mechanism, and the building of political will to address this issue.

J. Brian Atwood, the Administrator of USAID made the logical observation that because landmines are one of the consequences of war, a demining effort should follow the same development phases as a nation planning a post conflict transition campaign. He suggested that the following phases of such a plan be applied to a nation which desires to free itself of the debilitating effects of landmines. Each step of the proposed plan assumes the integration of effective mine awareness, survey and clearing activities.

- **Phase I: Confidence building among the people; stresses military demobilization, small projects which demonstrate positive change.**
- **Phase II: Reviving economic activity; meaningful employment and the resumption of agricultural activities.**
- **Phase III: Restore the electoral process.**
- **Phase IV: Extension of government influence into the country; both geographically and functionally.**
- **Phase V: Consolidation; the transition of restructuring and demining activities from the responsibility of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) (or other organizations providing support) to the host country.**

We believe that the policy statements made by the President, the Secretary of State, and the Administrator of USAID provide a strong and viable "top-down" approach to the problem of demining and can be used as an effective template to begin planning and coordinating country demining plans.
