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Becoming Part of the Hope

Tracey Begley

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Personal experiences with landmines and 10 years of working in mine action have shaped Johan van der Merwe. “I arrived in my assignment with the rest of the mine action team,” van der Merwe says. “It wasn’t long until van der Merwe and Focsaneanu became good friends, but he also introduced me to humanitarian mine action.”

Working for the United Nations, van der Merwe hopes to continue the fight against landmines and uphold the standards of past and current mine action practitioners. “I can’t stay away from the many thousands of innocent and local mine action practitioners out there,” he says. “As a member of the IMAS Review Board, I try to ensure that the standards are written in such a way that they provide global guidance for those that have to work with them and that they decrease the risk of engaging in mine action activities.”

According to van der Merwe, global mine action is due for a change in strategy and methods. “I would like to see a more unified, smart, and circular approach to dealing with the global mine problem,” he says. “Our approach to dealing with the problem has not changed very much over the past few years. The recipe has been the same: establish a mine action authority, provide it with the information needed, and get the states to work toward a common mine action goal. We need to see a greater cohesion among countries, as well as increased efforts from both government institutions and local non-governmental organizations.”

Van der Merwe’s experiences in mine action over the last 10 years have given him a wealth of unforgettable memories. Meeting celebrities and public figures was not something unexpected, but it was very special. “The solution is not always to establish a mine action authority,” he says. “Our approach to dealing with the problem has not changed very much over the past few years. The recipe has been the same: establish a mine action authority, provide it with the information needed, and get the states to work toward a common mine action goal. We need to see a greater cohesion among countries, as well as increased efforts from both government institutions and local non-governmental organizations.”

Van der Merwe feels that the mine action community should be involved in every country. “Countries with larger landmine problems, we will spend more time in capacity-building of both government institutions and local operational capacities and will need assistance long-term funding to do so.”

Although there is much to be improved upon, van der Merwe feels he and other mine action practitioners have made a lot of progress and helped to get the way for future success.

Van der Merwe’s job entails a number of responsibilities, but he welcomes them with open arms. “My role is to be a technical advisor to the mine action portfolio managers with the mine and demining technical advisor positions, working mainly with the United Nations Mine Action Service.”

Van der Merwe’s job is to assist the mine action portfolio managers with all stakeholders to work toward a common mine action goal. “We need to set aside our individual agitations, political goals, and decide what we want to achieve over the next five years,” he says. “We also support the mine action community design response plans instead of using template solutions that are applied from country to country. Another important activity would be to continue the training of mine action practitioners at all levels.”

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Humanitarian Demining as a Precursor to the Life-Cycle Perspective of Mine Action, Paterson and Filippino

The Road to Mine Action and Development: The Life-Cycle Perspective of Mine Action, Paterson, and Filippino

Mine Action and the Millennium Development Goals, Van Der Linden

Environmental Applications in Demining, McLean

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Environments as a Precursor to the Life-Cycle Perspective of Mine Action, Paterson and Filippino

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Raw data does not help decision-makers unless it is “analysed” into information. Information is the right data presented in the right format at the right time to the right people.