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Roots of Peace: Turning Mines into Vines

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ROOTS OF PEACE

Roots of Peace, a non-profit NGO, works hard to provide solutions to landmine-stricken countries and communities around the world.

By Stacy L. Smith, MAIC
From Mines to Vines

Roots of Peace was founded in 1997 with a clear mission—to rid the world of landmines by transforming toxic mine fields into thriving farm land, and also into vineyards. Founder/Director Heidi Kuhn established the non-profit NGO based in California’s wine country after the death of Princess Diana in 1997. “Her legacy in catalyzing the issue of landmines to the forefront of the international agenda during the last few weeks of her life inspired the hearts of global citizens to care about these deadly seeds of destruction,” says Kuhn. With this legacy in mind, Roots of Peace is making progress by turning “Mines into Vines” and by extending beyond the traditional role of a NGO. Kuhn believes that Roots of Peace will be “a catalyst that brings new resources, new energy and greater public awareness to the cause of a landmine-free world by creating innovative and highly energized public and private partnerships.”

The Roots of Peace Solution

Roots of Peace provides a comprehensive, long-term solution to landmine-stricken countries and communities on the following four fronts: awareness, removal, treatment and restoration.

Awareness

In December 2000, the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs (HDIP) joined efforts with Roots of Peace to launch a $1 million (U.S.) ad campaign designed to make San Francisco, CA and Washington, D.C. residents and commuters aware of the threat of landmines. Advertisements displayed in backlit bus shelters force area residents and commuters to imagine the effect landmines would have on their lives. In addition, these advertisements provide information for residents and commuters interested in participating in the landmine effort through donations to Roots of Peace and the Slovenian International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance. “This project is a prime example of public-private partnerships working together for peace,” Kuhn said. Contributions from Digital Advertising Agency, Infinity Outdoor and BeSafe Displays made the awareness campaign possible. The campaign ran from December 2000 to April 2001 in San Francisco and is still on display in Washington, D.C.

Management

The Roots of Peace solution, involving the removal of landmines/UXO, also includes public-private partnerships with companies such as AutoDesk, a software company working to assist demining activities worldwide. In cooperation with AutoDesk, Roots of Peace supports greater use of sophisticated Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology. With the right data and information gathered and plotted accurately on digital maps, demining decisions are better and safer eliminating many of the threats faced by men and dogs in the field.

Treatment & Restoration

As part of the solution to eliminating the threat of landmines, Roots of Peace also provides victims with psychological, social, and community treatment and rehabilitation. In addition, land affected by landmines is also restored for productive, environmentally responsible and sustainable agricultural use.

Joint Venture with the U.S. Department of State

In January 2000, a public-private partnership team composed of the U.S. Department of State, NGOs and U.S. corporate representatives traveled to Landmine Consultant for the University of Texas in Austin.

Led by CROMAC officials, the team visited agricultural areas heavily laden with landmines/UXO. “In personally touring the terrain, we collectively agreed that the best agricultural region for our Mines to Vines initiative was in Zadar, a grape-growing region with an 8,000-year-old history of producing wine,” Kuhn said. Once assessed, this area would be cleared of landmines/UXO and reused for agricultural purposes. At the time, members of the team also hoped to develop and implement a clear strategy for funding future clearance missions. As a result of the visit, many public and private supporters such as the North Face company and the FedEx Corporation announced plans to supply additional resources for clearance missions.

The Roots of Peace Initiative

Just five months after the joint venture to Croatia, Roots of Peace collected its resources and funds totaling $500,000 and began its four-front initiative in the designated region of Zadar. Roots of Peace headed clearance operations that took place in the Croatian villages of Dragalic, Ciste Male and Ciste Velika.

In May 2000, Roots of Peace completed its first international demining initiative in the Croatian village of Dragalic. As a result of the Balkan War (1991-1995), Dragalic’s fields contained countless landmines/UXO. Through the Adopt-A-Minefield program, Roots of Peace funded and implemented projects clearing approximately 9,000 square kilometers of land. In addition to clearance operations, Roots of Peace also replanted fields with grapevines in the once war-torn region.

Roots of Peace finished its second demining project in the villages of Ciste Male and Ciste Velika during July 2000. In collaboration with the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy, and the International Trust Fund, Roots of Peace demined over 100 acres of land in the two villages.

Conclusion

Since 1997, the humanitarian efforts of Roots of Peace have led to funding and implementation of landmine awareness, removal, treatment and restoration. Kuhn attributes the success of the Roots of Peace solution and initiatives that convert landmine-laden fields into plentiful farmland due to the “partnership of [ordinary] citizens” who have turned “ideals into reality.”

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