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Radosav Zivkovic
Stop Mines

Megan Burke
ICBL-CMC Survivor Network Project

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Stop Mines Launches Landmine Survivor Project

Stop Mines, a non-governmental organization (NGO) based in the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), is currently training 10 landmine survivors to become beekeepers through the "May Life Be Sweet" project. A small portion of the money raised through the sale of honey will be used to fund the training of other landmine survivors. This project has been funded by Adopt-A-Minefield (AAM), a program of the United Nations Association of the U.S.A. and in partnership with the Better World Fund, through its survivor assistance program.

by Radosav Zivkovic, Stop Mines and Megan Burke, Adopt-A-Minefield

The Lingering Impact of Conflict

The signing of the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995 marked the end of open conflict in BiH and the beginning of peace. Unfortunately, it did not mark the end to landmine casualties. The 2002 *Landmine Monitor Report* states that as recently as 2001, landmines/UXO explosions killed 32 people and injured 55 others—12 of which were children. All but three were civilians. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) has records of 4,733 landmine casualties since

1992 with more than one-third of these having occurred after the war ended. Sadly, these numbers don't tell the whole story. The majority of landmine accidents go unrecorded. Despite knowledge of the dangers of mines, people continue to put themselves at risk out of economic necessity. The majority of accidents occur during the summer months as farmers cultivate their land as a way to provide for their families.

While the government tries to address the medical and socio-economic needs of survivors, most continue to be neglected—their basic needs unmet. One of these survivors is Radosav Zivkovic or "Zika" for short. In 1992, when war broke out, Zika, like most men his age, was conscripted into the military. In April of 1994, when one of his colleagues was shot by a sniper while crossing a minefield, Zika rushed to his side and, while kneeling down to help his colleague, he knelt on a landmine. Like many landmine survivors, Zika escaped with his life but lost his leg.

While such an accident could cause many people to isolate themselves, Zika was driven to improve the situation in his country and to do what he could to prevent future landmine accidents. In 1999, he registered Stop Mines as the first national non-governmental demining and mine risk education (MRE) organization in the Republic of Srpska. Over

the last four years, Stop Mines has proven to be an effective organization that clears mines on a non-profit basis while focusing on principles such as safety, quality, productivity and cost-effectiveness.

Mine Victim Assistance

Preventing future landmine accidents in BiH by clearing mines and educating people about the risks is critical. However, to take a comprehensive approach to mine action, Stop Mines also seeks to address the long-term needs of landmine survivors—a priority that is close to Zika's heart. From September 2000 to October 2002, Stop Mines helped 130 survivors get fitted with prostheses through the Institute for Rehabilitation in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Getting survivors back on their feet is a crucial first step toward their reintegration into society.

Once this need has been met, many survivors say that what they need most is a job. In a survey completed in September of 2002 by the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration, survivors ranked "employment and economic integration" as their top priority for assistance. Faced with high levels of unemployment and discrimination as a result of their disability, many survivors are unable to support themselves or their families. With the launch of AAM's Survivor Assistance Program in the autumn of 2002, Stop Mines found a new ally in its efforts to help survivors become fully integrated into their communities. As its first survivor assistance grant award, AAM agreed to provide the \$20,664 (U.S.) needed to implement a pilot program to teach a select group of landmine survivors to work as beekeepers.

May Life Be Sweet

The "May Life Be Sweet" project was implemented in March of 2003. Stop Mines contacted each of the war veteran's associations from the 14 municipalities in the Republic of Srpska. They were asked to nominate one candidate from their region. Stop Mines then met with each of the 14 candidates. After struggling with this difficult decision, the staff at Stop Mines was able to determine who they felt would benefit the most from being included in this trial and who was likely to be most successful. Ultimately, 10 candidates were selected and asked to participate in the program. During the visit, a Stop Mines representative also assessed the planned location of the bee boxes and visited with the local beekeeper who would provide necessary support to that participant.

During May and June, Stop Mines purchased beehives and other necessary equipment for the new beekeepers. All the candidates were trained during a one-day seminar, which was videotaped with copies given to each candidate as a reminder of the process. Finally, by mid-June, the beehives and other equipment were delivered to the candidates who are now fully engaged in their new professions. Over the next several months, each new beekeeper will receive occasional visits from an experienced beekeeper who will answer any questions that may have arisen and provide advice.

Once each candidate begins earning money by selling the honey and other related products, Stop Mines will set up a Common Honey Fund that will finance other projects for landmine survivors, thus allowing the project to pay for itself and also demonstrating to the participants that they are not only helping themselves but also contributing to the welfare of other landmine survivors.

The Story of Marjan Planic

Marjan Planic is one of the 10 survivors who is participating in the beekeeping project. His story helps demonstrate how critical this project is in the lives of the participants.

The sun continues to shine in the



■ Marjan Planic, a landmine survivor, stands beside his beekeeping equipment.

Conclusion

"May Life be Sweet" is a small but important step toward ensuring that landmine survivors in Bosnia can lead full and meaningful lives. Until Bosnia has been declared "mine-safe" there will continue to be survivors who will face serious challenges as they rebuild their lives. AAM and Stop Mines will continue to work together in the hopes that we can have a positive impact for individuals and communities throughout Bosnia. ■

Stop Mines was founded on January 11, 1999, in Pale, Republic of Srpska, Bosnia. With a staff of just 25 individuals, Stop Mines undertakes humanitarian demining, MRE and mine victim assistance.

AAM is a public/private partnership among the United Nations Association of the U.S.A., the United Nations, Ted Turner's Better World Fund, and the U.S. State Department to clear minefields, provide assistance to landmine survivors, and raise awareness of the global landmine crisis. Since its launch in 1999, the campaign has raised over \$8 million for mine clearance and survivor assistance and cleared over four million square meters of land with an equal amount currently under clearance. With partner campaigns in Canada, the United Kingdom and Sweden, AAM is engaging hundreds of thousands of individuals around the world in resolving one of the most serious humanitarian problems of our time.

**All graphics courtesy of the authors.*

Contact Information

Megan Burke
Adopt-A-Minefield
E-mail: mburke@unusa.org

Radosav "Zika" Zivkovic
Stop Mines
E-mail: office@stopmines.org

small village of Podgrab, Republika Srpska in BiH. In Marjan Planic's yard, the buzzing of bees brings hope. All members of the Planic family lend a hand in the beekeeping, hoping that soon the honey production will provide a stable and sufficient income for living. In BiH, it is difficult for a person to provide enough for his or her family. For Marjan Planic, this task is made even more difficult—he lost his leg to an AP mine in May 1993. He is the sole provider for his wife and three sons: Milos (5), Marko (4) and Milan (4). Marjan managed to find employment at a local wood factory. He works eight, sometimes even 10 hours, per day, yet he has not received his paycheck in six months. His family sold its home and now lives on someone else's land.

Hope now shines on the Planic family. The entire family wants to help in beekeeping, even the small boys, Marko and Milan. They must still get over their fear of the bees though. Members of the Planic family are beginner beekeepers and will receive training and advice during the next year through the AAM program. Experienced beekeepers from the neighborhood drop by and give a few technical pointers while noticing the high quality of the bees. Others, maimed by landmines, ask where they can receive similar donations. Marjan sends them all to Stop Mines.

■ Planic, a participant with the Stop Mines project, with his family.

