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Seven Common Myths about Landmine Victim Assistance

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Seven Common Myths About Landmine Victim Assistance

Myth 1—Landmine survivors and victims, unlike discovered mined areas, stockpiles or factions using landmines, do not diminish (in the short term) with time and are not threatened nations. Therefore, the rorschach of victims often spawn great post-event psychological and societal stress, which often has no outlet or expression.

Myth 2—The success of the Landmine Ban Treaty will eventually alleviate the need for victim assistance.

Landmine survivors and victims, unlike discovered mined areas, stockpiles or factions using landmines, do not diminish (in the short term) with time and adherence to the treaty. Landmine casualties—some 300,000 of them—will not disappear when the last of the landmines has been located and destroyed. The effect of the treaty has been most heartening; by various accounts, rhe number of new landmine casualties has diminished (in the short term) with time and adherence to the treaty. Landmine victims; such a requirement should be created just to look after the landmine victims; such a requirement would be ludicrous in light of the great healthcare challenges facing landmine-threatened nations. Therefore, the challenge seems to be to find a way that current medical policies can accommodate all accident victims, including victims of landmines.

Myth 3—Prostheses are good today that victims are quickly back in the mainstream.

It is true that some modern prosthetic devices border on the miraculous. However, there are several problems with making them accessible and practical to landmine victims in developing countries:

1. They are expensive.
2. Prostheses wear out and have to be
red" and replaced. No. 1. The more advanced the device, the more imperative it is for it to be routinely applied, fitted, and maintained by qualified technicians. No. 2. The body and role of the user will often change the device needs to change with him or her.

Oftentimes considerations for lack of them result in victims jettisoning inappropriate or badly fitted devices and opting for a more traditional and more primitive—but locally accepted and available—aid, or for no apparatus at all.

Myth 25: Victim assistance, like mine risk education, is a fully integrated component of mine action.

For a while, it was considered quite appropriate to treat victim assistance and mine risk education as twin components of a mine action campaign; they were both seen as complementary to the "core" business of finding and panning (marking, monitoring, and clearing) mined areas. However, as plans and operations have unfolded, it has become evident that mine risk education is quite often a complementary action undertaken in the same context and environment as marking, monitoring mined areas, surveying, and clearing, while victim assistance is generally accomplished out of these geographical and professional circles.

While mine risk education can be practiced by operators, local educators, or community volunteers, victim assistance is best accomplished by healthcare and medical professionals whose background is not operational or community-based.

Myth 26—Victim assistance programs are being designed and predicated on casualty data and victim information processing.

Many countries do not have the wherewithal (luxury!) to collect data for one small-at-risk segment of a population that is prone to numerous other dangers. Often Ministries of Health look to Mine Action Centres to collect and aggregate this data, while the centers are looking right back at the Ministry. More often, there is no communication at all.

For political or resource reasons, sometimes a country will try to minimize casualty figures; sometimes it will try to exaggerate them. Organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) make heroic attempts to gather this information, but the global data is still thin and in regards to planning comprehensive victim assistance efforts, not good enough to allow for effective planning. It is even unclear what casualty data would be most valuable to those planning landmine clearance, mine risk education projects, or developmental plans.

Myth 27—Effective victim assistance programs must be expensive programs.

Victim Assistance programs need to treat the victim as a human being and not as a casualty statistic. Sometimes this may require extensive costs, but often it can result from working smarter. Some victims will need prosthetic help, others will need re-training, some will require rehabilitation, some counseling, some therapy, some accessibility (socially and so physically). Sometimes it can merely mean that policy goals are properly articulated and implemented locally.

The caution, therefore, is to try to produce a program designed to support the "total person." We cannot break the bank by trying to be all things to all men. Often, the prescription can be a locally applied remedy, which may not be expensive but which may be invaluable. Money cannot always be the answer, for there simply is not enough of it to be applied to the small universe of landmine victims. The solution—easy to state, hard to implement—is to use what we now know about landmine victims to individually design programs for each victim, but to apply them locally, realistically and cost effectively.

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Landmine News Around the World

Conflict in Iraq Poses Threat of Additional Landmines

In mid-September, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) warned enemy governments that they must continue to apply with the guidelines for the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. The issue of a possible war between the U.S. and Iraq causes concern for the possibility of the addition of antipersonnel mines in war zones in and around Iraq. Although not all countries are direct signatories of the Mine Ban Treaty, the ICBL confirms that State Parties must insist that those not party to the treaty do not use mines in joint operations, or participate with those that do.

Actress Takes on Fight Against Landmines

In late October, actress Angelina Jolie visited various demining centers in hopes of raising mine awareness around the globe. Jolie became an advocate of mine action while filming the movie "Tomb Raider" in Cambodia several years ago. As a result of her newfound dedication to the cause, Jolie has recently adopted a child whom she believes may have lost his parents to landmines. While the recent split of Jolie and husband Billy Bob Thornton has brought about unexpected hardships in Jolie's life, she is more motivated than ever as she takes on the struggle for mine action.

Landmine Lesson Strives to Break Records

On November 12, 2002, English-To-Go challenged their own Guinness Book of World Records record for the largest simultaneous "Instant Lesson." Continuing last year's "Instant Lesson," teachers in over 100 countries all around the globe joined together and simultaneously taught about the terror of landmines. While the results are still coming in, English-To-Go hopes to reach a world-wide classroom of over 80,000 students. English-To-Go supplies English language training materials to teachers and home educators in over 110 countries. The company strives to make interesting and engaging lessons about global current events. For more information, see http://www.english-to-go.com/largest.

Night of 1000 Dinners: A Second Helping

Last year, the first "Night of 1000 Dinners," a worldwide charity event presented by Adopt-a-Minefield and the Canadian Landmine Foundation, raised over $1.4 million (U.S.) for demining efforts. From celebrities to government officials to everyday citizens, people in 30 countries sat down at the dinner table on November 30th to enjoy each other's company and contribute to a solution for the world's landmine problem. This year, on December 5th, Adopt-a-Minefield is hoping to bring even more people together for this cause. Organizations such as the Reeves of Peru, Rotary International, the U.S. Campaign to Ban Landmines and the Mine Action Information Center are affiliates of the event. To register yourself for a dinner or to find out more information, visit www.1000Dinners.com.

Youth Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize

Sixteen-year-old Gerson Andres Flores Perez is more than an average teenager; he is a reminder to all that the youth of the world hold the future in their own hands. Perez began speaking about world issues at the mere age of ten, after landmines in Columbia killed seven of his friends. He then began writing a peace proposal that would take him years to complete. He has currently been nominated for the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize and actively participates in raising mine awareness by speaking at various conferences. Perez serves as a prime example of the motivation and dedication that is needed to conquer the war against landmines.

Asian Countries begin Clearance of DMZs

In early September, North and South Korea took the first step in achieving mine clearance goals. The two Asian countries began the process of demining the border between the two, along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This gradual clearance could lead to the development of new methods of transportation, as well as improved relations between the two countries. This event clearly advances the clearance process, despite the fact that it is a very small step in the grand scheme of mine clearance. The United Nations has praised this significant step for North and South Korea may cause other countries to follow in their footsteps of demining DMZs.

New Sponsor a Mine-Detection Dog Program Launched

Mine detection dogs are a key factor in detecting and clearing landmines around the world. They are trained extensively in sniffing out explosives, and for this reason are very expensive to support. Costs for training and housing the dogs can add up to as much as (US)$8000 per month. In an attempt to cater to the growing needs and budget that support mine-detection dogs, the Norwegian Peoples Aid (NPA) has constructed a program to fulfill these costs. People can sponsor a select mine-detection dog and therefore make an individual contribution to the safety of others throughout the world. Money donated to the program will certainly have a positive effect on the amount of mine-free land in countries in need of assistance.