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Engaging Civil Society Through Public-Private Partnerships

by Stacy Davis and James Lawrence [U.S. DOS Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement]

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Remember when you washed cars with your classmates to raise money for a band trip? Or perhaps your children sell wrapping paper to raise funds for their schools. These, and a variety of other fundraising techniques, from the simple to the sophisticated, are being used across the United States and around the world to raise awareness and generate resources for humanitarian mine action. The U.S. Department of State's Public-Private Partnership Program seeks to harness the power and creativity of individuals, civil society and the private sector to address the harmful effects of landmines, as well as unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war. Recognizing just what can be accomplished when people decide to take action, we help organizations increase their exposure and amplify their message. In the process, the Partnership Program has become one of the State Department's most successful initiatives for engaging the private sector and unleashing the "power of the people."

In late 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Secretary of Defense William Cohen launched an ambitious new program, the Demining 2010 Initiative. An important element of this initiative was an appreciation of the contributions and role played by the private sector. The State Department identified five organizations involved in mine action and showcased their efforts at a major international conference in May 1998. Throughout 1998, the State Department continued to join forces with a growing number of organizations. First to join were the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, Landmine Survivors Network, the Humpty Dumpty Institute, the Polus Center for Social and Economic Development, and Roots of Peace.

In the years since, many new groups have joined the Partnership Program, bringing the current count to some 50 members. The types of organizations involved range from international service organizations like Rotary International to small foundations with just a few staff, and include corporations, student groups and a broad range of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Members are involved in all facets of mine action: mine clearance, mine risk education, survivors' assistance, and related efforts to pro-

mote social and economic development. The Department of State's role—carried out by the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs' Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA)—has been to promote communication and collaboration among the many groups involved in mine action and to offer support for partners' mine action efforts. For example, PM/WRA's Partnership Program sends speakers to their events, shares materials on mine action, and organizes conferences and workshops. More recently, the Department has initiated a small grants program to help fund new and creative initiatives by partners to raise awareness and resources for mine action.

The results thus far have been extremely positive. As former Secretary of State Colin Powell said, "The engagement of private citizens, civic groups, corporations, foundations, educational institutions and other organizations in partnership with the U.S. government has been one of the most exciting developments in mine action."

There are many examples of tremendous efforts undertaken, thanks to concerned individuals coming together to take action. On a field trip to Cambodia in January 2005, PM/WRA Director Richard Kidd visited a village where signs proclaimed that mines had been cleared and a well installed by Freedom Fields USA (a Carmel, California-based organization), Rotary International and HALO Trust. This demining and redevelopment project was entirely funded and managed by private groups; no government money was used.

Another project, initiated by the Humpty Dumpty Institute, turned surplus agricultural commodities—in this case dry milk obtained from the U.S. Department of Agriculture—into cash. The proceeds from this monetization project in Angola were then given to HALO Trust to demine an important network of roads. Through the Partnership Program, PM/WRA introduced two foundations, Grapes for Humanity and the Julia Burke Foundation, to the Polus Center. Both those foundations visited Polus projects in Nicaragua and Honduras designed to assist landmine survivors and other disabled individuals, and

raised funds to open and sustain these community-based organizations. Through the Partnership Program, the One Sri Lanka Foundation met several like-minded organizations, including People to People International, and successfully raised funds to demine valuable farm land in the Jaffna Peninsula.

Another exciting part of the Partnership Program is education outreach. Students tend to be idealistic, active and eager to share their knowledge with friends, family and neighbors. Targeting this group has been extremely satisfying because of the students' response to the issue. Studying about mine action enables students to learn about the wider world, make connections and reach out to their peers overseas, and become involved in solving an important global problem. Even though landmines are far removed from the everyday lives of most Americans, focusing on this issue can draw students, their parents and their teachers into a deeper understanding of the global community in which we live. Landmine curricula introduce schoolchildren to the impact of landmines through social studies, geography, language arts and other subject areas, including service learning.

A large number of educational institutions, from middle schools through the college and university level, have taken up the landmine issue. In many cases, the students and their teachers have followed through by developing service learning projects to raise community awareness and funds for mine action. One of these student groups at Tenafly Middle School in Tenafly, New Jersey, actually created a non-profit charity, Global Care Unlimited. Global Care Unlimited has heightened local awareness of the global landmine threat, funded the clearance of a minefield near the Ale Husidic school in Tenafly's sister village of Podzvidz in Bosnia and Herzegovina, raised funds to help landmine survivors in Central America, and, most recently, raised awareness and money for mine action and other humanitarian causes in Cambodia. In February 2005, some stu-

Concerned individuals from Rotary International and Freedom Fields USA supported a demining NGO carrying out work in Cambodia.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PM/WRA

dents took a trip with Clear Path International to Cambodia. They have also organized day-long workshops to introduce other students in the New York/New Jersey region to the issue and encourage their involvement.

In addition to supporting our partners in their endeavors, PM/WRA invited all the partners to get together for the first time for a Public-Private Partnership Workshop in February 2005. Following this successful gathering, PM/WRA is optimistic that the program will continue to grow and make further contributions to mine action.

In cooperation with its partners, PM/WRA's future goals include enhancing communication and collaboration through the newly created Partnership website (<http://maic.jmu.edu/partnership>) and LISTSERV®, supporting the creation of an International Landmine Awareness Day, and seeking new ways to strengthen and institutionalize the Partnership Program. If your organization wishes to become a part of the Partnership Program, please contact PM/WRA using the information in the next column. ♦

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WORKSHOP SUPPORTS PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

For three cold days in February, approximately 50 public and private mine action organizations from Afghanistan to Vietnam gathered in the Washington, D.C. area to exchange ideas about their work. The Public-Private Partnership Program Workshop was hosted by the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA). The workshop gave participants the opportunity to collaborate with PM/WRA representatives and fellow organizations in an effort to strengthen partner activities and communication.

During the workshop, representatives from partner organizations were given the opportunity to take the floor and make presentations explaining their efforts in mine action. Presentations ranged from the latest developments in mine detection and clearance to the current medical care and rehabilitation services provided by Walter Reed Army Medical Center for U.S. troops injured by improvised explosive devices and mines. Between partner presentations and group discussions, Col. John Jordan from the Department of Defense spoke about his organization's support for mine action. Representatives from the U.S. government provided tutorials for applying for mine action grants and accessing additional U.S. government resources, and Bob Eaton from the Survey Action Center presented the latest findings from Landmine Impact Surveys, noting the most heavily mine-affected areas.

Partners were also given time to meet in small groups and discuss possible collaboration with other organizations. Representatives brainstormed ideas for how they could work together to advance mine action and what novel approaches they could use to achieve that goal. To improve partner communication, groups suggested a mine action chat room, an interactive web page and an expanded newsletter that would include continuous and up-to-date mine-related information. These sessions provided a time for partners to note any upcoming outreach, awareness and fundraising events that involve their organization. The dates have since been combined on one calendar for all partners to access (available online at <http://maic.jmu.edu/partnership/calendar.htm>).

Suggested ideas to increase awareness of the landmine problem included implementing public service announcements and media blitzes, sponsoring art shows that highlight children and landmine survivors as well as hosting wine-tasting fundraisers. Some representatives proposed asking U.S. soldiers injured by landmines or UXO in Iraq to tell their personal stories and act as mine action spokespeople.

The Department of State and PM/WRA specifically take their relationships with their public and private partners seriously. To maintain this effective cooperation in mine action, organizations were asked to give feedback and ideas for how PM/WRA can better support partner operations. Groups suggested PM/WRA use its elevated profile to make press releases or media notes announcing mine-related events. Partner discussions also revealed that organizations would benefit from more sponsored workshops and opportunities to collaborate in person.

At the end of the workshop, Cindy Virdi from ROSEcharities, an organization that provides cost-effective rehabilitation, said that because of the workshop, "I learned a lot about the world of NGOs. I am a newcomer to this scene so I occasionally found it overwhelming but also very exciting. I am glad that there are so many people who are passionate about bettering the lives of others." Virdi appreciated the ample time allotted for networking with other participants.

Following the workshop, some partners have suggested creating a humanitarian mine action consortium that would facilitate organizations' operational and fundraising efforts while raising awareness of the global landmine problem. The HMA Consortium is now forming and the Mine Action Information Center at James Madison University is serving as initial Secretariat. The goals of the consortium are to raise public awareness of landmine issues, disseminate information on how private citizens and groups can help, and generate resources. For more information on the Consortium or other aspects of the Partnership Workshop, please contact Amy Burkhardt, Partner Relations Coordinator, at burkhaam@jmu.edu or (540) 568-2332.

—Sarah Sensamaust