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Interviews With HMA Directors: Dr. Jane Cocking

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MAG, Mines Advisory Group

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DR. JANE COCKING, OBE



Dr. Jane Cocking joined MAG (Mines Advisory Group) as chief executive in January 2017. She has more than 25 years' experience in the humanitarian sector and has led response to multiple crises across the world, from Somalia to Syria. Cocking has also been involved in many strategic initiatives to improve the quality of humanitarian response. She worked for the ODA (the Department for International Development's predecessor) and Save the Children before spending almost 20 years with Oxfam GB, eight as Humanitarian Director.

1. In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing the conventional weapons destruction (CWD) and humanitarian mine action (HMA) community today? How can the international community address there?

We have clear goals and the skills to free millions across the world from the fear of landmines and bombs; we have strong political backing from many places and great donors but this support needs to be expanded. The main challenge our community faces is universal political will.

Funding continues to be an issue for the sector as a whole, in many areas the amounts we need are, in global budgetary terms, not huge. More political will from some actors to contribute creatively to this financial need would go a long way. Stronger collaboration with and support for governments in affected states to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities would make our sector more cost effective and sustainable and must be delivered.

2. How has your prior experience in the humanitarian sector prepared you for being CEO of MAG? What lessons have been the most valuable for you?

I have learnt that if you stick to your principles and have high technical standards, then you'll achieve the best you can. Nearly 30 years in the humanitarian sector have given me extensive experience of solving complex problems in environments, which are physically and politically extremely difficult. The people who work in the humanitarian, CWD, and HMA sectors are very motivated and committed and they need the same thing—to have the right skills and support at the right time. Oh, and a sense of humour and humility go a long way!

3. Going forward what opportunities do you see for MAG and other HMA nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and how well prepared do you think the community is for the future?

The biggest opportunity is for HMA NGOs to be a key part of delivering a mine free world—this is a rare chance for the international community to show that when it makes a commitment, as it did over 20 years ago in the *Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention*, that it delivers on that promise.

Beyond this, the skills and knowledge that we have are unique in the NGO world and we must apply them to other problems which threaten people's safety and their futures—for example the management and destruction of small arms and light weapons and ammunition—we just need to be clearer and more creative about how we use this knowledge and skills.

4. As a strong, female leader involved in the NGO sector, what has been the most significant barrier of your career?

The biggest barrier is always if you don't believe you can do something. Once you're over that and you believe you can, then there is always a way to do anything so long as your heart is in the right place. It's a real joy to see younger women clearing this hurdle with ease!

5. While working in HMA, what experience or lesson or event has impacted you in your role as CEO the most?

Every time I travel to a MAG program, I talk to ordinary people in the communities where we work, and there is always someone who says or does something that reminds me of why we're there, and it sticks in my mind. When the day-to-day business is complicated and difficult, then remember that one person and do the right thing by them. ©