



Letter from the Editor: **THE JOURNAL OF CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS DESTRUCTION** Celebrates 25 Years!

Steven Costner [Deputy Director, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement,
Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, U.S. Department of State]

The *Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction* is the leading publication in the fields of humanitarian mine action (HMA) and munitions destruction and security. Since 1997, experts in these fields have shared their critical thinking and innovative ideas on how to make their practical work safer and more efficient at the same time. For this 25th edition of *The Journal*, I invite you to join me in celebrating all the present and past authors who have shared their ideas, inventions, and perspectives to improve the lives of countless communities around the world.

When I joined the Department of State over thirty years ago, humanitarian demining was a radical occupation not given much international attention. Then Princess Diana thrust the dangerous work of deminers into the spotlight in 1997 when visiting minefields in Angola and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The United States first funded a humanitarian demining program in Afghanistan in 1988, planting the seed for what has been the most robust conventional weapons destruction (CWD) program globally. Since establishing a dedicated HMA program in 1993 (and then expanding it in 2001 to include small arms and light weapons [SA/LW] and ammunition destruction and security), the United States has provided more than US\$4 billion to support HMA, weapons and ammunition destruction, physical security and stockpile management (PSSM), and associated activities in more than 100 countries. But funding totals don't reveal how much has been accomplished, so let me give you a few examples: From 2016 to 2020 alone, these programs have resulted in the destruction of more than 139,316 SA/LW and over 67,000 tons of ammunition, making it harder for terrorists and drug traffickers to get weapons. We have cleared more than 1.4 million landmines and explosive hazards, and returned 225.87 sq mi to post-conflict

communities for safe and productive use, promoting stability, security, and prosperity in the process.

My personal visits to the fields of Cambodia, Chile, and Zimbabwe impressed on me the dangerous work deminers undertake in sometimes very harsh conditions. Heat, rocky terrain, thick brush, and steep hills are just a few examples. I quickly appreciated the vast backgrounds these deminers came from, all joined by the common desire to provide safety and economic growth for their communities and their children. As the horrendous attack on a HALO Trust camp on 8 June 2021 in Afghanistan demonstrated, the work of deminers in countries still experiencing conflict sometimes brings with it the ultimate sacrifice. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by adversaries has added an additional layer of risk for many organizations and has required additional training to detect and render safe such items. Of course, the threat is not limited only to deminers. All too often a civilian stepping on a decades-long hidden landmine or a child picking up a brightly colored piece of unexploded ordnance results in life-altering injuries or death.

The Journal has managed over the years to illustrate how the work of demining has evolved and the skills required to render communities safe can be honed through up-to-date training. The articles published in *The Journal* have introduced or explained bright ideas to reduce this suffering. Authors have demonstrated that dogs, rats, drones, LiDAR technology, excavation, and simple tedious inch-by-inch manual landmine discovery and extraction are all viable methods to render land safe for travel, agriculture, and development.

I have advocated first-hand as head of delegation to many negotiations and conferences on SA/LW and ammunition for destruction and other PSSM measures as an effective way to reduce both illicit proliferation and the risk of catastrophic explosions at arms depots that threaten civilians. Many technologies are available to destroy, secure, and mark these weapons. I witnessed in Ukraine that SA/LW ammunition can safely be destroyed with varying methods. We applauded *The Journal's* decision to expand its scope in 2016 to cover this important set of issues.

The year 2020 presented all of us with exceptional challenges professionally and personally due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The United States has remained committed to HMA and weapons destruction and security, with funding reaching more than \$259 million in 2020 alone, despite the significant and constantly evolving logistical challenges. In many places, our implementers have unmatched logistics capabilities that can enhance life-saving efforts. National and local authorities, the mine action sector, and various actors in the protection space have delivered countless risk education (RE) sessions around the world. However, geography, conflict, local cultural dynamics, and, most recently, the global pandemic continue to present obstacles to presenting traditional RE to at-risk communities. Over the past year-and-a-half in particular, *The Journal* has published articles on innovative RE methods that are vital to helping such communities thrive and live safely.

Congratulations to all those that have contributed to making *The Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction* the premier publication in its field that it is today—and congratulations in particular to the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University. I hope you enjoy this special 25th edition of *The Journal*. ©

Steven Costner on a field visit to Zimbabwe.

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Department of State.

