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Adopt-A-Minefield®: Engaging Civil Society in Mine Action

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Adopt-a-Minefield

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Adopt-A-Minefield:

by Nahela Hadi [Executive Director, Adopt-A Minefield/UNA-USA]

FOCUS

In 1998, following the signing of the Ottawa Convention, the United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA) began developing a program to address the landmine issue. The challenge was UNA-USA wanted to do more than just raise awareness of the landmine problem. We did not want to leave people without the ability to act once they had learned about the problem and felt compelled act. We wanted to do something different through a program that would engage civil society in clearing minefields. Thus, the Adopt-A-Minefield (AAM) campaign was born.

Based on the Adopt-A-Highway program, the AAM model allows donors to "adopt" specific minefields and raise the necessary funds to clear them. The aim was to work with strong and effective partners in the field who could nominate high-priority minefields for clearance, clear the sites with funds that were raised, and forward pre- and post-clearance reporting, as well as clearance certificates. Given UNA's varied constituencies from individual members in 175 chapters across the United States to member organizations, businesses and others, we knew that our strength was in developing and implementing creative outreach programs to engage all constituencies.

With this in mind, we created formal partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to implement our program in the field and with Ted Turner's Better World Fund, which saw in AAM a unique opportunity to actively engage the grassroots in a pressing international issue. The Better World Fund estab-

lished a 25-cents-to-the-dollar match to cover administrative costs and allow AAM to forward 100 percent of mine clearance donations to the United Nations and AAM's partners in the field. Additionally, the U.S. Department of State saw that AAM provided an important mechanism for generating additional funding for the field of mine action and therefore provided vital start-up funds to help us establish the program. With these partners by our side, UNA-USA set out to develop what is today the largest grassroots mine action campaign raising funds to clear landmines and help landmine survivors.

In March 1999, AAM was formally launched to raise awareness of the global landmine crisis and to raise funds for mine clearance in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, and Mozambique. Our biggest challenge was engaging the general public in a problem that does not exist in the United States. In fact, most people had only become aware of the landmine problem as a result of Princess Diana's publicized trips to minefields in protective gear. Following her death and the decreased media attention to the issue, most people quickly forgot about landmines.

The first group of donors to join AAM in its efforts was the UNA chapters across the country. Because of their explicit interests in foreign policy and the world beyond our borders, UNA members immediately understood the issue and the goals of AAM and became spokespeople in their own communities. As a result of this strong network, schools, local businesses, churches, temples and civic organizations became involved in local AAM campaigns. Before long, chapters were raising \$20,000 to \$30,000 (U.S.) to clear fields that they had adopted. Additionally, because of the chapters' local efforts, several churches and Rotary clubs started their own separate efforts to raise funds for AAM. Today, grassroots contributions constitute one-third of AAM's overall dona-

Mine Action Implementing Partners

- Accelerated Demining Programme (Mozambique)
- Afghan Technical Consultants
- Association of Inva Corporation
- Bosnia & Herzegovina Mine Action Centre
- Cambodian Mine Action Centre
- The Cambodia Trust
- Clear Path International
- Comprehensive Disabled Afghans' Program
- Croatian Mine Action Centre
- Demining Agency for Afghanistan
- Handicap International - Belgium
- Handicap International - France
- International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance
- Jaipur Limb Campaign
- Landmine Survivors Network

tions for mine action. UNA chapters alone have raised well over \$1 million.

About a year after the launch of AAM, we were approached by the Canadian Landmine Foundation with a proposal to partner with us to bring AAM to Canada. While the culture of philanthropy in the United States is unmatched by others, the AAM model can easily be adapted to different countries. In late summer of 2000, AAM (Canada) was launched in Toronto.

5 Years of Mine Action

2000

- AAM Canada joins AAM as the first partner campaign.
- Heather Mills and Paul McCartney join as Goodwill Ambassadors

2001

- AAM UK joins as the second partner campaign
- Vietnam is added as AAM's sixth country program
- AAM's 1st Annual Gala Fundraiser, hosted by Heather Mills and Paul McCartney, is held in Los Angeles

2002

- Night of 1000 Dinners, AAM's grassroots fundraising campaign, is launched
- AAM Sweden becomes AAM's third partner campaign
- AAM begins the Adopt-A-Team program in Afghanistan to respond to the need for greater flexibility in mine clearance following the Coalition bombing in 2001

Clear a path to a safer world

Engaging Civil Society in Mine Action

- Mines Advisory Group
- Mine Detection Dog Center (Afghanistan)
- National Center for Disabled Persons (Cambodia)
- National Institute of Demining (Mozambique)
- Operations Enfants de Baltambang
- Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation
- POWER for Victims of Conflict
- Sandy Gall's Afghanistan Appeal
- STOP Mines
- United Nations Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan
- Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
- World Rehabilitation Fund
- World Vision Cambodia



Sir Paul McCartney and Lady Heather Mills McCartney at AAM's 2004 Gala.

Later, in the fall of 2000, Lady Heather Mills McCartney and Sir Paul McCartney joined AAM as Goodwill Ambassadors and Patrons. Heather had long been involved in the landmine issue starting during the war in the former Yugoslavia. Then, when she lost her own leg in a motorcycle accident in London, she became an even more passionate advocate, particularly for landmine survivors. Both she and Paul felt that AAM was the perfect vehicle to raise global awareness of the

landmine problem and to raise new funds for mine action. In addition to bringing her name to the cause, Heather brought a new dimension to our work, adding survivor assistance to our mandate. In the spring of 2001, our second partner campaign, AAM (UK), was launched in partnership with the UNA of the United Kingdom at a ceremony hosted by Paul and Heather.

Having partner campaigns and high-profile Goodwill Ambassadors/Patrons helped spring-

board AAM to a new level. The celebrity of Paul and Heather naturally brought media attention, which in turn brought the landmine issue to people whom we had not yet reached through our grassroots campaigns. Our coalition work was also enhanced by the efforts of our campaign partners in Canada and the United Kingdom. In particular, AAM (Canada) concentrated its efforts on Rotary clubs across Canada, which in turn further increased the involvement of Rotary clubs in the

2003

- AAM's Survivor Assistance Program is launched to address the needs of landmine survivors
- The Special Appeal for Iraq raises over \$100,000 in four short months to address emergency mine clearance and survivor assistance needs

2004

By the end of 2004, AAM had:

- Raised over \$13 million for mine action
- Successfully cleared nearly 19 million square meters (7.34 square miles) of land
- Assisted thousands of landmine survivors in nine of the most mine-affected countries in the world

2005

- AAM expands its signature education program, That Landmine Thing
- Annual Night of 1000 Dinners will be held on Nov. 3, 2005
- Annual Benefit Gala in Los Angeles will be held on Nov. 15, 2005



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PHOTO COURTESY OF NAHELA HADI

An Afghan deminer from Afghan Technical Consultants participates in AAM's Adopt-A-Team program.

United States and United Kingdom. Additionally, our Canadian partners brought a new initiative for the global AAM campaign: the "Night of a Thousand Dinners" (N1KD). This new addition raised enough mine action funds to expand our field impact and add a sixth country program, in Vietnam, where they support mine clearance teams in Quang Binh province.

N1KD is a simple concept based on a common activity that cuts across all cultural divides: eating. The idea behind N1KD was to engage people from all walks of life and backgrounds to share a meal while raising funds for mine action. Individuals sign up to host a dinner on the N1KD website and invite their friends and family over. AAM provides host kits, which include a video, suggested recipes, talking points and other AAM materials. N1KD allows people who cannot adopt a full minefield or participate in community efforts to host an event and make a contribution. Now in its fifth year, N1KD takes place in 40 countries around the world. Also, the dinner concept has evolved to include wine tastings, dessert nights, brunch, and even "non-dinners," which means you're invited not to come to dinner, but simply to make a contribution.

In the summer of 2001, AAM held the first annual Adopt-A-Minefield Benefit Gala with

Heather and Paul in Los Angeles, California. The format for the evening dedicated time both to the landmine issue and AAM's work as well as to the fabulous entertainment of Paul McCartney and guest performer Paul Simon. That evening, many of the attendees learned for the first time about the existence and impact of landmines, the work of AAM and our partners in the field, and the story of survival as presented by the first recipient of the AAM Humanitarian Award, Radosav "Zika" Zivkovic, a landmine survivor and founder of STOP Mines. Now in its fifth year, the AAM Gala has become one of our most popular events in LA, with Jay Leno as host. Other guest performers have included Brian Wilson, James Taylor, Neil Young and Stephen Stills. Many who attend the LA Gala go on to participate in other ways, including the "Night of a Thousand Dinners" and their own creative projects.

By the fall of 2002, AAM (Sweden) was added as a third partner campaign with

UNA-Sweden and we officially launched our Survivor Assistance Program. Once again, AAM used the model of working with strong partners in the field who provide much-needed services while raising funds here in the United States and in our partner countries. By this time, our realm of supporters had expanded into the corporate world with Federated's I.N.C. International Concepts (INC) clothing line, our first corporate partner. INC launched a unique partnership with Heather Mills and AAM, whereby Heather was the spokesmodel for INC clothing and AAM was included in all of the advertising and promotions featuring Heather. Additionally, INC made a substantial donation to AAM's mine action work.

Finally, 2002 was the year that AAM changed its program in Afghanistan from the minefield model to the adoption of mine clearance teams. This change allowed donors to support the United Nations' emergency response demining efforts following the Coalition bombings. This new model was launched at a private fundraising dinner hosted by Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones in their home. The donor response to this program continues to have a major impact on clearing landmines, UXO and other remnants of war to allow for the safe return of refugees and clear a safe path for reconstruction.

By 2004, our donations were coming from three distinct groups, the grassroots that includes students and schools, special events, and corporate and high-end individuals. Special initiatives demonstrate that AAM had become a well-known charity that elicits donor creativity. A second example is a reception and auction organized by the European Union to commemorate Europe Day and raise funds for AAM.

March 2005 marked the end of AAM's sixth year and the achievement of having raised over \$13.6 million to clear over 19 million square meters (7.34 square miles) of land and help thousands of survivors of landmine accidents. The most important lesson that we continue to learn is that by working directly with our supporters, we not only raise vital funds for the field, but we create strong personal relationships and help foster a bond between donors and the communities that their funds help clear and support. In this way, we aim to continue to expand our efforts in the next five years, working with our mine action partners in the field and increasingly engaging civil society around the world in our effort to clear a path to a safer world.

If you would like to receive regular updates about our work, please sign up at our website, listed below. ♦

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New Guides Available

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining has released Arabic and Russian versions of the *Guide to Mine Action*. Also GICHD's *Metal Detectors and PPE Catalogue 2005* was recently updated, taking into account most detectors currently available on the market, and is available for download. Free copies of the guide and catalogue can be ordered online at <http://www.gichd.ch/>.