

## Clear a Path to a Safer World: Addressing the Tragedy of Landmines

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action  
Remarks to Smith College, Polus Center  
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Thank you, Stephen, for that kind introduction, and good morning to all of you. Thanks so much for being here. It is a particular pleasure for me to be at Smith College. The last time I was here was a very long time ago; I and a fellow Harvard student were here on a double-date arranged by my sister, who is now an alumna of Smith College. I recall that we went to a Roberta Flack concert. I will not divulge how long ago this was out of consideration for Ms. Flack.

I appreciate the efforts of our co-hosts and co-sponsors, especially President Carol Christ of Smith College, the Five College Consortium, and The Polus Center for Social and Economic Development, in setting up this important conference.

I want to commend all of the participants at this Conference: the students from over 30 colleges and universities, some of whom are on panels or presenting papers; the representatives of international and non-governmental organizations who have come from North America, Central America, Asia and Europe; and members of the Pioneer Valley community.

I congratulate Michael Lundquist and Stephen Meyers of the Polus Center, the Student Steering Committee, and the Rotarians who are facilitating the activities of the conference throughout the weekend. Thank you.

I also want to acknowledge the participation last night of two special friends and colleagues: Mary Jean Eisenhower, President and CEO of People to People International, and Anthony Lake, the former national security advisor of the United States – a very senior position in our government – and now Chairman of the Marshall Legacy Institute along with his many other affiliations. Both are valued partners in mine action.

Now, the last time I was at Smith, it would have been a big deal if Carol King were on campus. Today, it is a big deal because Colin King is here with us; he is very probably the world's top expert on these deadly munitions known as landmines. Each of these distinguished individuals sets an example and adds critical support, expertise, and encouragement to the efforts in which we are all engaged – to help make the world safe from the dangers posed by millions of persistent landmines in over 60 countries around the world.

What is the “tragedy” of landmines? Any war is terrible. It is a breakdown of civil order, a failure of diplomacy. The destruction of war can be terrible. But it becomes even more tragic when weapons of war kill people long after the war is finished. These landmines are “persistent” – meaning the danger of an explosion “persists” for years or even decades.

It is the ultimate tragedy when a landmine explodes under the footstep of someone who never even knew what the war was about – like a child. This happens every day, somewhere in the world.

And so let's consider what we mean by “humanitarian mine action.” Humanitarian mine action is not about persistent landmines and other unexploded ordnance as much as it is about the effects of these “hidden killers” on the non-combatants, the innocent, whose lives are forever changed when they explode. And as you will see this weekend, humanitarian mine action is a very special and meaningful endeavor, connecting the lives of very different people all over the world.

Humanitarian mine action furthers the cause of peace and stability. It helps protect workers and other civilians from harm; restores land to productive use, and offers something essential for communities ravaged by war: hope. Believe

me, the hope we all can provide can turn a life around, or even a locality. In political terms, it can be meaningful to an entire country recovering from conflict.

Many of the non-governmental and international organizations and experts with us today are engaged in at least one of the three main pillars of humanitarian mine action:

1. Mine clearance – the hard work of getting these hazardous bombs out of the ground, including detection, removal and research;
2. mine risk education, where children need to be taught not to do what comes naturally, which is to pick up funny looking things they see on the ground; and
3. landmine survivor assistance, the critical help given to those who have survived a landmine accident, and to their families.

In raising the awareness of Americans to the realities of life in mine-affected regions – and in taking positive steps to assist communities and individuals there – you can make a difference and demonstrate the power of citizen action.

After listening to and learning from both the experts and your peers this weekend, we want you to consider how you can extend your reach beyond the classroom. How to bring mine action into your communities with creative ideas and commitment to the task of eradicating the threat of landmines to people around the world.

This country has a long and honorable tradition of global philanthropy and citizen diplomacy. The free flow of people, ideas, and goods have made this country strong and successful. And so it is also in our own interests to find common cause with people around the world, not only at a national level but also, at the most fundamental human level.

I'll be candid: I'm trying to get more mine action money out of the U.S. Government. But I also think the American people have a lot to offer.

We want you to take action. You have a voice, and banding together, you have real power to make a difference. There are people all over the world without the means or the influence to change their lives. So this will be my challenge to each of you: to take what you learn here at Smith College and translate it into action once you return to your campuses and communities.

So there is the challenge and the opportunity we all have. Here's a little background on the government's role.

Since the United States first began providing humanitarian demining assistance to Afghanistan beginning in 1988, the U.S. has been among the leading nations in efforts to make the world mine-safe. Earlier this week, in Bosnia, I met a Lieutenant Colonel at our Embassy in Sarajevo who was one of the very first trainers of the Afghan deminers in 1988; so he is an historic figure in mine action. Since 1993 alone, the United States has invested over \$700 million in humanitarian mine action in 43 countries.

Thanks to the efforts of the United States - and the U.S. taxpayers - along with the generosity of other donor nations, the United Nations, and non-governmental organizations, as well as private citizens and businesses, I can report that great progress has been made in mine action over the past 10 years. Mine action really works.

Consider this evidence:

- First, reported civilian casualties are down from an estimated 26,000 annually as recently as the late 1990s to less than half that number – about 12,000 – in 2002;
- And second, impact surveys have advanced what we call "area reduction," more precisely pinpointing where the landmine infestation is greatest as well as the hazard to populations and impact on farming and other economic development activity. We are improving our ability to prioritize the areas that need to be demined first. With so many places in the world still at risk, we really need to narrow the scope of where to apply our precious demining assets next.

Beyond our country's vigorous efforts to tackle the persistent landmine problem through our own humanitarian mine action program, and on the policy front via the Amended Mines Protocol to the Convention of Certain Conventional Weapons, we have taken additional steps in Washington to mobilize the necessary effort on this problem.

One of these steps was the creation, in 1997, of a position as the Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action, to help coordinate the U.S. Government's Humanitarian Mine Action Program across many agencies and to encourage private citizens and organizations to engage in mine action efforts through

the creation of public-private partnerships with the State Department.

We now have more than 40 partnerships with civic groups, including Rotary International, People to People International, and the United Nations Association, foundations, and student groups. This weekend's conference is a result of our partnership program.

This weekend, we want to acknowledge and applaud the individual successes of the organizations present here and have you help us to bring this vision to a much wider audience. In a moment we'll talk about a few of those successes. But first, I just want to give you a perspective on how far the whole mine action concept has evolved in such a short time, thanks to the commitment and courage and generosity of the people who do this work in the field.

They started by counting things: how many mines are removed, how many victims helped, how much land cleared, how many children educated about the risks of landmines.

Now, we are measuring how many trained deminers these countries have, and how many mine detection dogs and handlers; whether a country has an effective national mine action center, and whether the refugees of war have returned home. We are measuring whether communities and entire countries have recovered from war.

Increasingly, it is becoming standard practice to link inputs – both funding and physical effort – to specific social and economic outputs, such as increased food production, restored roads, improved hospitals and clinics, reopened schools, access to fresh water, decreased casualty rates and enhanced livelihoods. Of course, the actual survivors of landmine accidents are a prime focus.

In helping to rebuild and restore countries that have been affected by persistent landmines from past conflicts, we have learned that it is not enough to focus on landmines alone. We must do something about the other closely related hazardous remnants of war, namely unexploded bombs we find on the ground - or other weapons that also pose a long-term threat.

I am speaking here of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, which is a big problem, and the imminent danger to communities and public order from caches of abandoned ordnance and poorly secured stockpiles of munitions that could blow up and pose a lethal threat to people nearby.

The U.S. Department of State is energetically working not only on humanitarian mine action, but on related efforts to mitigate small arms, light weapons and these other closely linked threats stemming from conflict. The new Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the State Department's Political Military Affairs Bureau will continue to foster public-private partnerships and help to create opportunities, such as this Conference, to educate interested people about these problems and challenge them to become personally involved. Our new office is covering a range of these post-conflict hazards, but our commitment to mine action will only grow stronger.

I want to call attention today to some of the conference participants here who exemplify how members of civil society, especially students, can help and are helping to tackle the global landmine problem.

Mollie Bresnahan, a student at Smith College, followed through on work begun by her father Shawn with the Polus Center to focus attention and support to survivor assistance projects in Nicaragua.

Mark Hyman and his amazing young students from Tenafly Middle School in Tenafly, New Jersey, developed an entire series of programs to promote their own non-profit organization, Global Care Unlimited. They have raised, with U.S. Government matching funds, \$40,000 to demine a village in Bosnia-Herzegovina and to help war victims in Nicaragua. Well done, Mark.

Kyleigh Kuhn, a high-school student from San Rafael, California, in combination with a non-governmental organization called Roots of Peace, founded by her mother Heidi Kuhn, and local television anchor Cheryl Jennings, organized "Pennies 4 Peace." Students in over 70 schools in Marin County, California are collecting pennies to be donated to humanitarian mine action.

Kevin Keane, from the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada, and a representative from the Youth Mine Ambassadorship Program of Canada, will talk on Sunday about how this program has worked in a country that has also been in the forefront of humanitarian mine action.

I hope that each of you will join our national and international effort and lend your energy, ideas and talent to working in humanitarian mine action.

I encourage you to use the meetings, workshops and the informal opportunities this weekend to truly help to "clear a path to a safer world."

And I extend to you my personal thanks and those of President Bush and Secretary of State Powell for gathering here this morning to kick off this conference.

You will find that mine action is a very rewarding activity. The landmine problem has a human face, and we all would be hard-pressed to find a worthier challenge in the humanitarian assistance arena. For many who give their efforts to mine action, it becomes a special part of their own lives – something you and I will want to keep as a meaningful part of who we are.

We've already accomplished one big step by coming together. Now let's resolve to start this journey with a great conference, and emerge at the end with a firm commitment to reinforce humanitarian mine action and help future generations to "walk the earth in safety."

Thank you.

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