

## People to People International

Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action

Remarks at People to People International's 15th Worldwide Conference

Kansas City, Missouri

October 11, 2002

Mary, thank you very much for that generous introduction. Good evening, everyone. Your Royal Highness, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank our distinguished hostess, Mary Eisenhower, and her excellent staff here in Kansas City for making it possible for me to join you this evening.

Tonight it is my sincere pleasure to welcome [People to People International](#) as an official partner of the United States Department of State in our fight against the global tragedy of landmines. Our partnership will be an important example of citizens and their government working together. We are all part of the larger international culture of caring about other people. It is my belief that we -- your fine organization and the Department of State -- can accomplish more by working together than we can working separately.

Landmines are small but deadly weapons that armies use to keep enemy forces away from a certain area. They are designed to explode when a soldier steps on them. The explosion is powerful enough to kill a small child. Adults often lose a leg, or a hand; many are blinded by the explosion. In over 60 countries, on almost every continent, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed or injured by these exploding munitions left behind from previous wars. Millions of landmines today lie in wait for victims. These landmines make it much harder for societies to recover from conflict. They threaten the stability of fragile governments, and hinder the ability of peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers to assist people in communities that have been torn apart by war.

The good news is that in recent years a lot of work has been done around the world to address this problem, including clearing landmines from the ground, a process known as humanitarian demining.

In 1988 the United States Government helped to launch the first international humanitarian demining project when we deployed demining teams to Afghanistan. In 1993, we formally established a worldwide Humanitarian Demining Program, and through it we now provide major assistance to 40 mine-affected nations. But governments alone cannot solve this enormous problem -- there is a lot of important work to do. That is why we have been enlisting the help of private citizens, and private organizations, who are reinforcing governmental efforts to make the world "mine safe," so people everywhere can live and work, and walk, without fear of injury or death.

"Mine action" is the term we use to describe all these efforts. There are three main pillars of mine action:

- humanitarian demining, which includes surveying and marking minefields and safely removing mines from the ground;
- mine risk education, which helps prevent injury and death by teaching people who live in mine affected areas about the dangers to be avoided; and
- landmine survivors' assistance, which includes medical care, therapy, prosthetics (or artificial limbs) and retraining for people injured by landmines. The first goal is for survivors to believe in themselves and work hard to ensure their future. We want to help them develop skills to enable them to provide for themselves and their families, and lead productive lives in spite of their injuries.

In 1997, the State Department established our first mine action partnership when we officially supported the [Adopt-A-Minefield](#) program of the [United Nations Association of the USA](#). This innovative effort allowed private individuals, clubs, schools or towns to raise funds for specific towns overseas in desperate need of help to clear minefields. Adopt-A-Minefield already has successfully cleared minefields in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Croatia and Mozambique. We in the State Department now have over 20 private partners who are doing wonderful work in the different fields of mine action. This public-private partnership concept is still a relatively new way to solve problems. So People to People International is in the forefront of an important new

innovation in our nation's foreign relations activities. And let me tell you, although our mine action partnership program is only 5 years old, it is working and working well.

Between the U.S. Government's official efforts and investment in humanitarian mine action totaling over \$600 million dollars since 1993 alone -- and tens of millions of dollars contributed by the private sector in the last few years -- Americans have joined with donors around the world to lower the rate of civilian landmine casualties. It was estimated in 1993 that as many as 26,000 people were being killed or injured by landmines every year. We now think the number is much closer to 10,000 casualties per year. Of course, that is still 10,000 too many.

But we can succeed with enough effort. In Kosovo, site of a recent conflict, the demining efforts of the U.S. and other members of the international community have worked, and this war-torn Yugoslav province was declared "mine safe" last year.

A number of specialized non-government organizations have been working for years, as we have, to address the landmine problem. You can learn about some of them at our display here at your conference. We are committed to supporting their work because each organization has something unique and valuable to contribute to the task of solving this urgent problem.

People to People International can make a big difference as well, with your long history of working to promote international friendship through humanitarian work. Your Committees on Education, Community Service Programs, and People with Disabilities can raise public awareness of the landmine problem and help mobilize resources to address needs around the world. Your outreach activities overseas will demonstrate to people in mine-affected communities that you care about their problems and that you are willing to help them overcome their challenges.

The Department of State, as your partner, would like to equip you with the tools, both individually and on a global scale, to embrace mine action as one of your humanitarian missions.

So I ask all of you tonight to learn about mine action, and to bring a message of interest, hope and commitment to your families and friends back in your home chapters. The State Department is proud to call People to People International its partner, and I am grateful to every one of you for opening your hearts and minds to this terrible, and yet terribly rewarding, humanitarian endeavor. With your interest and commitment and help, we can accelerate the process of making the entire world "mine safe."

Thank you.

[End]