
A LANDMINE-SAFE WORLD BY 2010: NOT AN IDLE DREAM

By Ambassador Donald K. Steinberg and Laurie B. Zimmerman



The United States is engaged in a concerted effort to eliminate the threat that landmines pose to civilians worldwide by the end of the next decade, say Steinberg and Zimmerman. They believe the United States can achieve this goal by “working with governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private citizens around the world.” Steinberg, former U.S. Ambassador to Angola, is the Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Global Humanitarian Demining. Zimmerman is a Harold W. Rosenthal Fellow working in the President’s Office of Global Humanitarian Demining; she is now completing her graduate studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

No one who has lived in a country plagued by landmines can be immune to the terror of these weapons. In the war-torn country of Angola, for example, one witnesses daily the tragedy caused by millions of landmines planted by a dozen separate armies over three decades of conflict. Throughout Angola, there are about 80,000 amputees from landmine accidents, hundreds of thousands of displaced persons driven from their homes and fertile fields, and millions of people suffering the adverse economic and psychological effects.

Around the world, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, from Cambodia to Kosovo, the 70 million mines planted in some 70 countries pose a threat not only to individuals — 300,000 of whom have suffered landmine accidents — but also to the political, economic, and social stability in mine-affected countries. Landmines are a barrier to peace and democracy; they prevent refugees from returning to their homes after conflict; and they hinder the transition from relief to recovery and development.

Our government is firmly committed to ending the humanitarian crisis caused by landmines. The goal of President Clinton’s “Demining 2010 Initiative” is to eliminate the threat of landmines to civilians around the world by the end of the next decade.

We are taking key steps toward this goal. Our government is financing programs in about 28 heavily mined countries to eradicate their worst minefields by providing equipment, financial support, and training

for deminers. In fact, the U.S. Defense Department has trained about 3,000 humanitarian deminers around the world, about one-third of the total number. We are working with UNICEF (U.N. Children’s Fund) and other organizations on mine awareness programs to help children and their parents identify and avoid these weapons. We are conducting extensive research into new demining technologies. Under USAID’s (U.S. Agency for International Development’s) Leahy War Victims Fund, we are funding the work of private groups to assist the survivors of landmine accidents with prosthetics, rehabilitation, and social reintegration programs.

In sum, we have spent \$250 million on these and similar programs over the past five years, and are expanding our efforts to more than \$100 million in 1999.

Despite the immensity of this challenge, the situation regarding landmines is not as hopeless as it often seems. Working with the United Nations and other foreign donors, Cambodia, for example, has cut its landmine accident rate by 90 percent since 1992. In Afghanistan, tens of thousands of hectares of previously mined farmlands are back into cultivation. In Mozambique, 6,400 kilometers of roads have been cleared, allowing thousands of displaced persons to return to their homes. There is welcome news as well from Laos, Namibia, Rwanda, and other countries.

To create other success stories, we are working with the United Nations, including the UN Mine Action

Service, the UN Development Program, and UNICEF; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); other foreign donors; and, most important, mine-affected countries themselves. Private Americans are doing their part as well, pooling their creative talents and resources on imaginative partnerships.

Further, the best scientific talents throughout the United States and the world are working to find better techniques for mine detection and clearance. The Defense Department's Night Vision Laboratory, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, and 15 universities around the nation are researching promising technologies, often applying space age technologies such as those used to detect life on Mars to the protection of life on earth.

Regrettably, these efforts are sometimes obscured by the fact that the United States has not signed the Ottawa Convention. Our government welcomes the global commitment to eliminate the humanitarian crisis caused by anti-personnel landmines (APLs), but we have not signed the Ottawa Convention because of the President's concern for the safety of our men and women in uniform and our unique responsibilities around the world in support of our friends and allies, including the defense of South Korea.

In negotiations on the convention, we sought two changes that would have allowed us to sign. First, we sought an adequate transition period to allow us time to identify and field alternatives to APLs needed to protect U.S. troops. Second, we sought a provision permitting continued use of our self-destructing and

self-deactivating mixed anti-tank systems, which are classified as APLs under the convention, but in no way contribute to the humanitarian crisis. Regrettably, these changes were not accepted.

Still, the United States will sign the convention by 2006 provided we can identify and field suitable alternatives to our APLs and mixed anti-tank systems by then. While there is no guarantee we will meet this goal by 2006, we are aggressively pursuing these alternatives.

Meanwhile, we have destroyed 3.3 million APLs. We will end the use of all APLs outside the Republic of Korea by 2003. In 1997, the President permanently banned the export or transfer of APLs, and we are seeking to universalize such a ban in the multilateral Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. We are pleased that the Senate recently ratified the amended Mines Protocol to the Convention on Conventional Weapons, which contains key restrictions on landmine use and has gained acceptance by important APL-producing and exporting countries that have not signed the Ottawa Convention.

Together with our humanitarian demining efforts, these steps are a serious, pragmatic approach toward landmines. Working with governments, international agencies, NGOs, and private citizens, we can achieve the goal of eliminating the threat of landmines to civilians around the world by the year 2010. The children of the new millennium deserve nothing less than to walk the earth without fear.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS TO FIGHT LANDMINES

— The U.N. Association of the USA and the Humpty Dumpty Institute launched in March 1999 the “Adopt a Minefield” program, which helps the United Nations and host governments demine the most dangerous minefields in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cambodia, Croatia, and Mozambique. Already, schools, civic organizations, and companies from 13 states are raising money under this program. The U.S. government and the UN Foundation are providing substantial funding for this initiative.

— DC Comics, the U.S. Defense Department, and UNICEF have produced about 1.5 million comic books for Bosnia, Central America, and Kosovo, in which Superman and Wonder Woman teach children how to identify and avoid landmines. Next up is a Portuguese-language version for Africa.

— The Marshall Legacy Institute has initiated an “Adopt-a-Dog” campaign to purchase, train, and deploy mine-detecting dogs. The U.S. Humane Society strongly supports this effort, in part because landmines kill up to a half million animals around the world each year. The U.S. government has provided seed money for this initiative.

— Groups such as Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVAFA), World Rehabilitation Fund, World Vision, Physicians Against Landmines, CARE, and the Landmine Survivors Network are helping accident survivors rebuild their lives through programs to provide prosthetics, rehabilitation, and social reintegration. Many of these groups receive USAID assistance under the Leahy War Victims Fund.

— VVAFA is leading a UN project to survey the extent of the mine problem in a dozen highly mined countries. This program — supported by the State Department, the UN Foundation, and Canada — will help plan new strategies and allow us to measure the success of our projects.

— The Rockefeller Foundation and other organizations are producing a comprehensive CD-ROM to educate students, civic organizations, and other entities around the world about the reality of landmines. Similarly, many schools in the United States are incorporating landmine-related issues into their curricula.