

“People to People International can make a big difference. . .with your long history of working to promote international friendship through humanitarian work. You. . . 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 Honorable Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant U.S. Secretary of State, in his address to delegates of PTPI’s 15th Worldwide Conference and Global Youth Forum.

MINE



PTPI entered a partnership with the U.S. State Department in its fight against landmines. Left to right, PTPI President Bill Jarvis signs the agreement announced by the Assistant Secretary of State, The Honorable Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., and CEO Mary Eisenhower.

ACTION

Initiative

Among the esteemed guest speakers at PTPI's 15th Worldwide Conference and Global Youth Forum was The Honorable Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs and Special Representative for Mine Action. He was pleased "to welcome People to People International as a partner with the United States Department of State in our fight against the global tragedy of landmines. . . We are all part of the larger international culture of caring about other people. It is my belief that we...can accomplish more by working together than we can working separately."

Educating people about the horrific consequences of landmines is an important first step. We know that in more than 60 countries, on nearly every continent, tens of thousands of people have been maimed or killed by these weapons of war. These aren't merely statistics, these are people — innocent men, women and children who struggle daily with lives that were forever changed in a split second. The good news is that you can help.

Secretary Bloomfield identified 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.

Members and friends of People to People International around the world have embraced this important effort in a variety of ways. Participants in "A Night of a Thousand Dinners" (N1KD) raise funds and dine with others around the world to "Eat Away At Landmines." Funds that are raised directly assist in clearing minefields, saving lives, supporting survivors, and assisting mine-affected communities in the process of reconstruction. This annual, worldwide effort is held December 5, with funds raised benefitting Adopt-A-Minefield. People to People International has also established the Mine Action Initiative Fund for those wishing to provide financial assistance. For further information about ways that you or your Chapter can assist, please contact PTPI World Headquarters or visit our website at www.ptpi.org. ■

LANDMINES

A *Survivor*

I went to Somalia with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) as part of the international humanitarian intervention. I hope that my Somali landmine experience can provide insights into the pain and suffering of the tens of thousands of landmine victims, both dead and alive, around the world. It expresses a real-life landmine nightmare. . .

. . . On December 16, 1993, my life was changed forever. My credit union staff in Lugh (located in the Gedo region, near the Ethiopian and Kenyan borders) decided to conduct site visits to legitimate lime producers whose manufacturing locations were several miles outside of town. The four lime producer applicants got in the Landcruiser back seat, while the three directors and the union manager, Abdulahi Farah Ali, got in the second row. I sat in the front seat between my driver Abdual Raman and Somali counterpart Mohamed Hassan Duale.

About 10 minutes into our excursion, we were coming to a ridge of a small gully. Then the Landcruiser lurched forward a little, and the inside filled with dust. I slowly looked at Duale, whose face was covered with dust, then down to my feet. I saw a white bone sticking out where my right foot used to be. At first, I wondered if that was my bone or Duale's. It was mine.

My first instinct was to get out of the Landcruiser. But my lower legs were not working. I grabbed the steering wheel to pull myself out of the car, hitting the ground with my back. My hand-held radio landed several feet from me at the base of the passenger door behind the driver's side door. Fortunately, before getting in the Landcruiser at the credit union, I had attached my radio to my belt, rather than the usual practice of carrying it in my book bag at the base of my feet.

I crawled for the radio, whereupon Abdulahi handed it to me. I remember saying four things after making the introductory call — "Kilo Romeo for Kilo Tango" (Kilo Romeo was my call

sign, while Kilo Tango was the call sign for Ken Turk, IRC Lugh Team Leader) — "I've run over a landmine. I'm bleeding. I'm O-positive. Send for an airplane."

Afterwards, I asked Abdulahi to open the door, but it would not open, so I then crawled the few feet back to the driver's side door and used my arms to place my legs on the seat. Abdulahi adjusted my legs on the seat then tied tourniquets around both my ankles. A bone was sticking out where my right foot used to be. The actual foot itself was hanging by stretched skin towards my knee. My left foot was still attached. I had lost the fourth toe and top part of my foot. Like an X-ray, I could see the bones going to the remaining toes. Laying there in the hot Somali sun on the hard sandy ground covered with sharp rocks with my mutilated, bloody feet on the driver's seat—I had a smile on my face.

Up to this point, I never thought about dying, but I was thanking God for what a wonderful and blessed life I'd had. Great parents. The best of friends. The realization of a dream that I did the things that I wanted to do and that even what I was doing in Somalia was a dream. How many people have the opportunity to do what they dream of since childhood? What could be a better feeling than helping people start their lives again after the civil war? Some days, I couldn't believe that I was getting paid for what I was doing.

Soon, I spit up blood, and then I thought that due to possible internal injuries I could be dying and that every breath I took could be my last. The only sad thought I had was that I would not be able to marry Kim, my

By Dr. Ken Rutherford, Assistant Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Southwest Missouri State University

'vivor's Tale

fiancé of two months and that we wouldn't have children, who, I believed and hoped, would make a positive contribution to this world. I then resolved that if I could pace my strength, energy and mind until I reached medical care, that I would live. I started breathing slow and calming myself down. I never cried, screamed or moaned. I looked up at Abdulahi and my other Somali staff and said that I enjoyed working with them and that we did our best.

I found out that help arrived around 30 minutes later. The first "rescuer" down the ridge was Ken. He and the Somali rescuers picked me up in a cradle position, holding my legs and arms under the shoulders, and then placed me in the back of a white pickup truck with my head on the lap of an Islamic Fundamentalist soldier leaning against the back of the cab while holding my head and his machine gun. My left hand was held by another soldier sitting on the side of the pickup truck with his gun as well. I remember looking up and into his eyes, with both of us squeezing each others hands. Ken was trying to keep my right foot on the leg while trying to maintain his balance in the bouncing truck. I remember thinking how great it was that Somali Islamic Fundamentalists were trying to save my life. Only several hundred miles away, in Mogadishu, they were trying to kill Americans. Here they were going over the same road where I had hit a landmine to get me to the hospital.

On the flight to Nairobi I almost died. To keep me alive, Tamera and a Belgium Doctor Joris Vandelanotte saved my life by not only giving

wonderful emergency medical care, but also giving me blood from their own bodies by direct transfusions.

I woke up with the (Nairobi Hospital) medical staff's hands holding down my shoulders explaining that they had to cut off my right leg to save my life. I asked if I still had my left. When someone said "yes," I started saying the first of my many thank yous to the hospital staff. On December 22, 1994, I was flown to Denver, Colorado, then transferred by ambulance to the Institute for Limb Preservation at Presbyterian/St. Lukes Hospital. Over the next six days, I had three more operations.

Since that time, I have undergone four additional operations in two other hospitals on the left foot, including its amputation. As a bilateral amputee with two prosthetic legs, I am able to play baseball, golf and soccer with my four children.

Nevertheless, the real point that I would like to make is: What about the other landmine victims? I am so lucky. I am lucky to have the best medical care, therapy and prosthetics available. Thus far, my medical care costs are in the neighborhood of a few hundred thousand dollars. What about the Somalis who are hurt by landmines? Who is going to help them? Who is going to pay for their care and therapy? There are thousands of victims around the world in places where having one's legs and arms is key to economic survival. They are the farmers, herders, traders and merchants, who need their limbs to work. These people do not have access to any medical facilities, let alone any of the quality that we have here, and they cannot quickly transfer

from one career to another. From the moment my vehicle hit the landmine, I found myself in a position that is not familiar to me in my role as a humanitarian aid worker. I had become a victim and disabled. Like so many others who have been victimized, I found myself questioning my life. As I struggled to save my remaining leg and recover, I discovered an overpowering wave of support and assistance both for myself and for my family that has me humbled, and I have realized that most mine victims are not so lucky.

In 1997, I started an organization, the Landmine Survivors Network, with another American landmine survivor, Jerry White, to help landmine survivors help themselves, primarily by helping them to recover and reclaim their lives. We traveled the world trying to figure out how to help, which included supporting the inclusion of victim assistance language in the Mine Ban Treaty (Article Six, Paragraph Three).

I have never been bitter or depressed about my condition. On the contrary, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to assist so many to help start their lives again after the civil war.

Editor's Note: Dr. Ken Rutherford is an American landmine survivor. Portions of this article were reprinted with permission from The Journal of Mine Action. To view the article in its entirety, please visit <http://maic.jmu.edu>.