Letter to the Editor

O n August 1, 2011, James (Jim) F. Lawrence was appointed Director of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA). Although this is a new official title for Lawrence, he is no stranger to the State Department or PM/WRA. He started his career with the Department in 1980 as the Executive Director of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, a program that annually admits 70,000 refugees to enter the United States and supports millions of refugees internationally. From 1998 to 2008 he worked on a number of different mine-action programs, serving as the Director of the Office of Mine Action Initiatives and Partnerships for the majority of that period. For the last two years, he has served as the Acting Director of PM/WRA.

When asked about his plans and goals as Director, Lawrence said he intends to continue on the path set out by his predecessor while at the same time, adapting to the many changes in the field of mine action. “The landmine problem has not disappeared, but it has reached a plateau. Several countries have declared themselves mine-safe and more will attain that status in the next few years,” he said. “My priorities are to continue with a strategic approach to the execution of our programs and the allocation of our resources. In the current environment of declining resources, we need to make our budgets go further even while our mandate is expanding to areas such as the destruction of small arms/light weapons and Handmines and stockpile security.”

He also emphasized the importance he places on empowering local populations to deal with their own mine-action issues. “Our strategy going forward will continue to focus on local capacity-building with the final aim of turning the program over to local experts.”

Lawrence made a point to comment on the personal satisfaction he gets from his job, both from the work itself and the exceptional people in the mine-action community as well as the enjoyment he is experiencing in leading his own team. “I love being able to hire extraordinarily talented people and watch them succeed.” In his role as Director, Jim Lawrence looks forward to continuing to support worthwhile conventional weapons removal programs and programs that will make the world a safer place for everyone.

~Dan Baker, CISR staff

We Can Only Be “Mine Safe” When We Are “Mine Free”

Despite the fact that the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction makes no mention of the term “mine safe,” it is still a frequent term used by mine-contaminated states. However, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines maintains that in order for states to be safe from the dangers posed by mines, all mined areas must be cleared—not only those areas which are deemed to pose an immediate threat.

by Tamar Gabelnick | International Campaign to Ban Landmines

Deminers walk over and cleared of mines during a ceremony to hand land over to a local community in Honman (2003).

Photo courtesy of Jacqui Hamon

In January 2011, Sri Lanka experienced its heaviest rainfall since 1917, bringing landmines and unexploded ordnance back into areas previously surveyed, partially cleared and deemed “safe” for populations to return. These populations are again at risk from injury according to the Sri Lankan Army, a risk that could have been avoided if all mined areas had been cleared rather than only high-impact regions. This example is just one of many reasons that the ICBL has insisted on the need for mine-affected states to fully clear all mined areas, not just those deemed to pose an immediate threat to the local population. Twelve years after the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMC) entered into force, some mine-affected states (both States Parties and others) maintain that reaching such a goal is neither possible nor necessarily a desirable end state. The ICBL strongly disagrees.

The Article 5 Framework

Article 5 of the APMC requires States Parties to "make every effort to identify all areas under their jurisdiction or control in which anti-personnel mines are known or suspected to be emplaced" and "to destroy or ensure the destruction of

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—Michael E. Lambert
Former Ammunition Technical Officer
Canadian Army and British Army