

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

“Manilla calling, Manilla calling!” was a memorable phrase from World War II to indicate that there was still hope and that the defenders were hanging on. While “Harrisonburg calling, Harrisonburg calling” does not have the same ring to it, we are nevertheless proclaiming that at the Mine Action information Center at JMU is alive, well, and full of hope!

The Humanitarian Demining Information Center indeed lives on under the new banner of Mine Action Information Center. What's changed? What remains the same?

Something Old...

We're still serving the U.S. Department of Defense – and we're doing it through our core capability of processing information for the global demining community. So in the most important way, things haven't changed at all. We are acting as a hub or clearinghouse for demining and mine action information. We plan to host several demining conferences this year. We will publish three electronic Journals - and maybe even a hard copy edition to boot! And of course, we will continue to bring you the latest information on conference schedules and news from around the world, which interests deminers.

Something New...

So what's changed? We plan to add many exciting activities to our list of services. Within our web site we will soon have a demining employment exchange page on which job needs and announcements will be posted. We will be developing a “lessons learned” section, which is a need we have heard expressed loudly and clearly almost everywhere we have gone. And we hope to develop a methodology for collecting and “filing” mine action information, which is available on hard copy, which will allow us to create a demining bibliography.

We believe that the need for mine action coordination is even greater than ever. To that end we will be reporting more on DoD humanitarian demining activities, to include establishing pages on the web site specifically dedicated to information from the Regional commanders-in-chief. We will also report on special demining support capabilities of the U.S. military.

But more than anything else, we will redouble our efforts to be a clearinghouse for valuable mine action information. We will continue to coordinate with the UN and the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining so as to complement rather than duplicate efforts. We want your questions, comments, and suggestions, which we research and answer via our switchboard operation, and solicit features, articles, and profiles for the *Journal of Humanitarian Demining*.

Something borrowed...

The most obvious thing that has changed is our name. From the first, we at JMU have stressed the integrative and interlocking nature of a host of activities which make up

“demining.’ But we have continually suffered from the reactions of many people who identify demining activities specifically with mine clearance and nothing else.

As an organization whose very core is a belief in the comprehensive nature of “demining,” we have taken the observation of Tore Skedsmo of the UN Mine Action Service to heart; the term “mine action” conveys the total challenge of landmine threat best. Hence the name, Mine Action Information Center at JMU. By so doing we hope to send the clear message that to us, all aspects of landmine operations should be countenanced to assure the greatest chances of success.

Therefore, we are soliciting and providing information on: 1) marking and monitoring of mined areas, 2) surveying techniques and operations, 3) GIS applications to demining, 4) mine awareness or alertness activities, 5) short term (medical) victim assistance, 6) long-term (rehabilitation, prostheses, medical, psychological) survivor support, 7) logistical and administrative support of mine action operations, 8) management and training issues, 9) innovative applications of technology and industry to demining operations, 10) planning and coordination procedures, and 11) the developmental and infrastructure context.

...And Something Blue

With the vision of attacking mine action problems in before us then, we dedicate the first Journal issue of the year to an examination of programs and campaigns which have implemented the concept of an integrated or comprehensive mine action plan. Our “blue ribbon” commendations go to organizations whose operations in Africa attempt to deal with the entire spectrum of challenges and responses to the landmine threat in their areas of operations. They warrant the close analysis of anyone who is interested in planning, analyzing, or improving an approach to mine action.

We do not present these reports in an attempt to anoint them as universal solutions to the demining problem. The way that Humanitarian Aid Medical Development Response trains paramedics in Angola may or may work for another organization, another country. The method that the German Agency for Technical Cooperation selects trainees for its mine awareness campaign may or may not work for another organization, another country. What is important is that these groups, like so many others, are in the field practicing techniques and procedures, which they have observed and are now reporting. More importantly, they have been conducting those activities in the context of a “mine action” or comprehensive and integrated whole. Therefore their results, observations, and evaluations provide a wealth of information about mine action activities by which others can – and should(!) – benefit.

We request your feedback on these articles. Some concepts are revolutionary, some are controversial, some are very smart, others need more thought and discussion. We, and the organizations who we present, encourage your responses to add to the dialog and assure that the body of knowledge we build will be properly vetted, debated, and – when appropriate – included in the arsenal of activities and procedures which are available to future mine action planners.

This is our first Journal that has a central theme. Africa, in all of its geographic and cultural diversity, also manifests an unfortunate diversity – the entire spectrum of landmine threats and scenarios. It is for this reason that we have decided to spotlight it in our inaugural thematic edition. Africa, from Capetown to Cairo, is deeply caught up in landmine problems – and solutions. It is to the examination of these problems and solutions that we dedicate this issue of the *Journal of Humanitarian Demining*.