

# Mine Action's Cracked Pillar

By Joe Lokey, Deputy Director

Just about anyone doing anything regarding landmines knows the four pillars of mine action. We routinely acknowledge that mine awareness, mine clearance, victim assistance and advocacy must all proceed simultaneously if the world is to be aware of the threat of mines, have safe roads, fields and schoolyards, support the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims and survivors, and convince all governments to move quickly toward a mine-free world.

The articles in this issue of the "Journal of Mine Action" focus on victim and survivor assistance as a crucial and critical pillar of that four-cornered approach. This crucial pillar, however, may be cracking. On the horizon, there are continuing questions about maintaining an adequate source of funding to ensure that resources needed get to victims, families, and communities and to ensure that the focus does not dissipate with waning interest in landmines as an "issue." The routinely short political attention spans now supporting action could quickly move on to the next emotional hot-button *de jour* and the funding needed is huge. The Landmine Survivors Network estimates over \$3 billion will be needed over the next 10 years to adequately address victim and survivor concerns. Mention dollar figures in billions and watch people cringe—crack one.

The in-country Mine Action Centers (MACs) being set up by either the United Nations or others are ill-defined, ill-equipped and insufficiently staffed to deal with their nation's victim assistance concerns. Most host countries feel that their Ministry of Health, or equivalent, is the sole party responsible for helping victims and any survivors. The countries that have landmine victims are those who can least afford to do anything about it. The drain on a national health system in a post-conflict environment is enormous and outside aid and assistance is usually the only source of additional resources. Though there are some success stories, it is not clear that this assistance is coming in any significant quantity. Poor internal direction and distribution is not easy to fix—crack two.

Without the organization and direction needed to give involved governments and industry partners a clear picture of how they need to help, the victim assistance pillar will be a weak one among the four. While the mine clearance area now focuses on specifically recommended technologies and programs that will make the biggest impact on mine reduction, the victim assistance area has yet to formulate specific strategic objectives on an international scale that guide resource managers to the most effective use of their contributions. The Guidelines for the Care & Rehabilitation of Survivors is an enormously valuable first step. It does a superb job of laying out principles and the foundation upon which rational national policies may be built. The clarity of these guidelines, however, may also be their biggest liability.

The fear within the survivor community that "positive discrimination" (giving landmine survivors aid that others equally in need can not receive) would somehow isolate them from the rest of the community has led to an aid approach that groups survivors with other disabled. While there is certainly no moral objection to this view it may be bringing unintended consequences. Pragmatically it: (1) cloaks survivor issues in a timidity that doesn't necessarily rise above other voices of need and (2) has enmeshed survivors within the greater social disability picture many donors consider unsolvable and too expensive to redress in the short term. Donors who passionately want to do something to help put a prosthesis on a victim will not be as enthusiastic if they understand their funding will be used to build wheelchair accessible ramps in downtown Cairo or lobby parliaments for greater disability benefits. Both of these possibilities lead to less funding for victim assistance initiatives—crack three.

The international community has had little coordinated response to these and other concerns. There is some optimism that the International Standing Committee of Experts (SCE) on Victim Assistance that met in Geneva in September 1999 would have come to the same conclusion and produce more than the customary moral outrage that has characterized many victim assistance conferences. The results of the Geneva meeting and its impact are just beginning to emerge. The main problem with the SCE is that it is inexorably tied to the Ottawa Treaty and all the baggage that entails. While the treaty is remarkable for the awareness and consensus it built, it is much less an actionable document and does not necessarily compel the transfer of resources to support mine action. There are those, however, who want to change that without changing the treaty.

Signatory States to the Ottawa Treaty may have unwittingly obligated themselves to raids on their national treasury under Article 6, Paragraph 3, when they agreed that “Each State Party in a position to do so shall provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration, of mine victims ...” Under this terminology, outside groups determine whether or not a State is in a position to do so and if, in their opinion, adequate resources are not forthcoming, then maintain that the State has abrogated its obligations and is in non-compliance with the treaty. The word “may” instead of “shall” would have left a true measure of internal authority whereas use of the latter forces the States to open their checkbooks to aid organizations and activists. This is no small point to countries with limited GDP growth and internal problems of their own. The solution to victim assistance long-term funding, in this extortionist view, is to legally compel states that signed the treaty to contribute. To attempt to “compel” aid via a treaty is a knife at the throat of the donor—crack four.

In the coming year, we expect to see a few more meetings and conferences at which very specific and tightly focused efforts will be made to inject some actionable programs and initiatives into the victim assistance areas. The victim assistance pillar of mine action may be cracked but is no where near crumbling. The articles in this issue of the "Journal" are written by some of the very best and leaders in global initiatives to strengthen this aspect. I would encourage all who read this to contact them and either get involved or coordinate your activity with theirs. Partnerships, teaming, and collaborative efforts are one of the best ways to strengthen victim assistance and add stability, balance, and a significant dose of humanity to global mine action programs.