

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES UPDATE ON LANDMINE VICTIM ASSISTANCE

COMMENTS PRESENTED BY WILLIAM A. MCDONOUGH, HEAD OF DELEGATION

VICTIM ASSISTANCE WORKING GROUP - TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2002

Thank you very much Madam. Co-chair!

I'm Bill McDonough of the Organization of American States Delegation.

We would like to compliment Mr. Nelson Castillo, Ms. Margaret Arach and Mr. Danis Gutierrez on their presentations.

When we chatted with Danis yesterday, I offered to make a few supplementary comments to frame some of the program management, donor, and training candidate selection issues related to the ongoing victim reinsertion efforts in Nicaragua.

For the OAS and the Government of Nicaragua, technical training for landmine victims in was a next, logical and important step in the process of socio-economic reintegration of landmine victims into the fabric of the mine-affected community.

The current training program which began in February 2002 demonstrates a number of important dimensions of the Nicaraguan Mine Action efforts. As a well developed, mature national demining program, it exhibits characteristics of, national will, donor confidence and the productive involvement of a range of national entities in the design and execution of mine action related projects.

Since 1997 Mine Action efforts in Nicaragua had provided coordinated medical treatment, prosthetic and orthotic devices and psychosocial counseling for some 426 Nicaraguan victims.

With the establishment of the IMSMA database in 2000 we were able to populate the database with substantial personal data for 425 victims. The availability of this data was of considerable assistance in selecting candidates for training.

Last year, we concluded a cooperative agreement with INATEC (the Nicaraguan national technical training institute). Our relatively modest goal was to begin a pilot training program for about 10 -15 % of the victims who had been assisted by the program.

Late last year, we conducted a selection process, choosing 26 training candidates who would enter the training program in February 2002. Training is underway in (1) Construction and Masonry, (2) Garment design and sewing, (3) Home appliance repair, (4) Shoemaking and shoe repair and (5) Microcomputer training

The coursework involves about 700-980 hours of instruction over a 9-month period.

Cost of training we calculate to be just about \$1,900 per student. This amount includes the cost of instruction as well as food, lodging, laundry and a modest monthly stipend during the training (we also provide a small per diem to permit a weekend home visit per month from the Boaco training site as it is some distance from most trainees' homes).

Not all of the funding needed is currently on hand, but we do have firm commitments by a donor government and some private funding is available. We feel fairly comfortable that sufficient resources will be secured.

We hope to start a second course cycle in another INATEC facility in the near future for 25-30 additional victims.

We would note that one trainee left the program two weeks ago, citing family financial needs as the reason.

Political will and the commitment of the government of Nicaragua was reflected in the opening ceremony for the training program by the presence of Nicaragua's First Lady and the vice-minister of Defense. Both women are strong and visible landmine victim advocates.

To conclude and answer the question of where do we go from here, the answer is simple, job placement. INATEC, Rotary International, the National Demining Commission and our office are cooperating on placement strategies for the trainees. Also, the Damas de las Americas, a group of Latin American Ambassadors and their wives in Washington have provided a \$ 25,000 grant which will be used in part to offer loans and grants to support uniforms, tools and supplies needed to support transition of the trained victims into the working community.

Thank you.