

# that Landmine "thing"

students making a better world

2006

a project of Landmine Survivors Network and Adopt-A-Minefield®

## Youth Ambassador Farah Ahmedi of Afghanistan Is the New Face of *That Landmine Thing!*

Ten years ago at the age of seven, Farah Ahmedi was running late for school in her hometown of Kabul, Afghanistan. Farah loved school and loved learning—so for her, running late was a very, very big deal. Spying a shortcut, she quickly took it, and ran down a back alley. But in a flash, her life changed forever. Farah had stepped on a landmine. The medical facilities in Afghanistan could not accommodate such a serious injury, so

Farah was taken to Germany by an aid group where her left leg was amputated and her right leg was fused at the knee. She spent the next two years recovering, alone and without her family.

Soon after Farah returned to Afghanistan to begin her life again, another tragedy struck. Returning from the market with her mother, Farah discovered that while they were gone, a rocket struck the family home, killing her father and her two sisters. These would not be her only losses. A few months later, Farah's brothers fled Afghanistan to escape the Taliban and disappeared; no one heard from them again. Farah and her mother eventually left for Pakistan. They traveled over the mountains on foot together, an incredible accomplishment given Farah's condition. They spent several years there as refugees, first in a camp and then as servants for a family in the nearby town.

One day, Farah heard that the American government, in response to the aftermath of the U.S. invasion into Afghanistan, was inviting a few families—widows and their children—to come to the United States to begin their lives again. Farah rushed to the embassy to apply. Her request was successful, and in 2002, she and her mother were finally relocated by World Relief—a non-governmental organization that helps refugees from around the world—resettle in the United States. They were relocated to Wheaton, Illinois, where they have been living for the past three years.

"There is a huge difference between America and Afghanistan," said Farah about the move. "Every moment here is safe. There are no bombs or rocket strikes to worry about. And you have freedom. I never doubted that moving to America would be a good thing. My mother was worried, but I convinced her we would be alright. She's very proud of me now for making that happen. And I'm amazed as I sit here across the ocean just as I imagined when I was a little girl, always dreaming about what it would be like to be on the other side of the sky."

Still, the transition took some time. "School is very different here," she explained. "The girls and boys are kept apart in Afghanistan. Students sat on the floor and we all shared old books. There weren't any school supplies. And there wasn't a lot of encouragement from parents to learn. Boys are taught the Koran and often attend school through the eighth or ninth grade, but education was seen as wasted on girls who were supposed to only get married."

*continued on page 4*



First Lady Laura Bush and Farah read from Farah's new autobiography.

## *That Landmine Thing: Help Save the Lives of Thousands of Children Around the World*

- It is estimated that 26,000 civilians are killed or maimed every year by landmines. Approximately 8,000 to 10,000 are children – about 30 children a day.
- Landmines are designed to maim, not kill adults. Because children are smaller, projectiles meant for an adult's legs can hit a child's head or vital organs.
- A child who survives a mine blast is likely to be seriously injured and permanently disabled. They may lose one or both legs or arms and suffer other horrific corporal injuries. Shrapnel may cause blindness and disfigure their face.
- Child amputees often are not able to attend school because of their disability. Many are too ashamed to leave their homes or play with other children.
- Children are particularly at risk because of their curiosity - they like to pick up and play with new objects and can mistake a landmine for a toy or harmless object. In Northern Iraq for example, some children use landmines to make wheels for their go-carts.
- Some antipersonnel mines, such as airborne butterfly mines, are painted bright colors specifically designed to attract children.
- The problem isn't just the difficulty of treating children, but the lack of any treatment at all. 85% of child victims of landmines die before they reach the hospital. (UNICEF Exec. Director Carol Bellamy)
- Handicap International estimates that, on average, a child may have to wait up to 10 years before having a prosthetic limb fitted.



Children like this Cambodian boy face the threat of landmines everyday.

- A growing child's artificial limb should be replaced every six months; adults need a new one once every three to five years. Prostheses cost around \$125; for a 10-year-old child with a life expectancy of another 50 years, the total cost is about \$3,125. (http://www.newint.org/issue294/facts.html)

### Welcome To Our

## Helping Kids Issue

- \* Learn how landmines affect children around the world
- \* Great ideas for student fundraising
- \* See how much it costs to clear a minefield and to assist survivors

\* **GET INVOLVED!** Join fellow students from around the globe in their quest to make a better world.

\* **JOIN THAT LANDMINE THING!**

E-mail: [info@ThatLandmineThing.org](mailto:info@ThatLandmineThing.org) to register your school and receive copies of this newsletter, videos and pictures. See page 4 for ideas on how to spread the word and raise money to demine and help survivors.

# Cambodia

Sakream Tbong village is the most landmine and UXO affected village in Sakream Commune, Prasat Balang District, Cambodia. When Vietnamese troops arrived in Cambodia in 1979, they established their bases in Sakream Tbong, and this area soon became a battlefield between the former Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese troops. To prevent their location from being attacked by the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese scattered thousands of landmines and other traps all around the area. After Vietnamese troops withdrew from Cambodia in 1989, this area was then governed by former State of Cambodia troops, and they planted even more landmines. Now, the 166 families (population 811) living here are struggling with the devastating aftermath of these weapons. Two thirds of the total land area of the village is landmine and UXO contaminated. Despite this fact, villagers must still use this land to grow food, and schoolchildren must still travel down makeshift pathways through the mines to get to their classroom. The mines and UXO endanger the villagers, and they also impede agriculture, infrastructure development, and economic productivity of the village.



The students of Sakream Tbong village school: Dim Cheu pictured front row center.

A group of AAM marathon runners raised sponsorship donations to run the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC, last October. AAM used the funds that were raised to clear land around the school in Sakream Tbong. The school had been in need of repair, but construction could not take place because the

school was in the middle of a minefield. So as the land was being cleared, another organization followed just behind, repairing the school and building additional classrooms for the students. AAM funds were also used to assist a young survivor named Dim Cheu who had been badly injured on the site. "One day in 2001," Cheu told us sadly, "when I was at grade 1 in Sakream Primary School, we went to clear the garbage around the building before going into the classroom as normal. At that time, I didn't know anything about landmines. During the clearance of garbage I saw a green round plastic thing. I mixed it with the garbage and broke it with a stone. When I did that, it exploded with a loud sound and I fell onto the ground unconscious." Cheu suffered several injuries, losing several fingers on one hand, his other arm, a leg, and an eye. Cheu is now having problems with the vision in his remaining eye; AAM is helping him get the medical attention he needs to save his sight. ●

# Jordan

Taha Ziyadeh was sixteen years old when he and two friends went to a field to collect old mining equipment near the city of Zarqa, Jordan. The boys picked up an odd looking object, not realizing it was an artillery shell, also known as unexploded ordnance (UXO). The UXO explosion killed Taha's two friends. He was severely injured and taken to the nearest hospital.

Taha's right leg was amputated below the knee. He remained in the hospital for two months and underwent eight surgeries to repair his left leg. Regardless of his disability, Taha was determined to have a normal life. One of the ways he did this was by participating in sports.

He began playing basketball with fellow amputees at the Jordan Sports Federation (JSF), a sports club for people with disabilities. Soon after, he was invited to be part of JSF's national team for the disabled. "Playing basketball helped me endure the pain of physical rehabilitation those first few years," says Taha. "The support of my teammates and the strength I gained from the exercise were key to my recovery. I think all people with limb loss should participate in sports. It is empowering to be able to compete again, and it increased my self esteem enormously." Taha has represented Jordan in many national and international tournaments



Taha Ziyadeh looks over his large stock of shoes.

as a member of the national basketball team, and also plays sitting volleyball on a team at a local sports club.

In 2001, Taha was introduced to an LSN Outreach Worker named Hani at a local market. Hani helped him develop a business plan for a small shoe store. LSN provided Taha with the seed money to start the business. His store is enormously successful, and one of the benefits of Taha's thriving business is being able to help fellow athletes at the Jordan Sports Federation by repairing their wheelchairs for free. Says Taha, "I love being able to help other amputees, and I know that by repairing their wheelchairs, they can participate in sports and gain the strength to recover fully the way I did." ●

# Mozambique

One remarkable group of students from two schools in Colorado raised a total of \$14,840 this past year to clear a minefield in Mozambique. Congrats to Lincoln Junior and Hinkley High School for their outstanding work. These students joined forces and embarked on a number of simple fundraising endeavors to accomplish this goal. From such events as collecting donations as sponsorship for marches through their town, to holding traditional African dinners for their community, to staging a landmine awareness event at school where students gave up the use of a limb for the day, they were able to clear an entire minefield all on their own. These students in Colorado are now connected to the students of Ressano Garcia, Mozambique, in a truly special way. Who says students can't make a real difference? ●

## Landmine Activists

# Unite!

Join UNA-USA's Student Alliance, a nationwide network of motivated young adults who stand poised to collectively sound their voices and make their opinions heard amongst their peers, in their communities and around the world on issues of global concern.

This is a great way to communicate with other students. Organize campaigns with other schools. Talk with each other about landmines. And not only do Student Alliance members advocate for landmine clearance and survivor assistance; they also mobilize students on a wide range of other international issues including HIV/AIDS, poverty and human rights. Student Alliance offers many benefits including:

- \* Networking and coalition building with other student activist groups
- \* Opportunity to apply for mini-grants to host UNA-USA sponsored events
- \* Invitations to UN-sponsored international youth conferences
- \* Promotion of local Student Alliance events via various media channels



Become a member of UNA-USA's Student Alliance: [www.unausa.org/StudentAlliance](http://www.unausa.org/StudentAlliance)

# CLEARANCE IN the field



Half of the funds raised from the 2003/2004 *That Landmine Thing* campaign were used by Adopt-A-Minefield (AAM) to clear minefield BiH-058 in Bosnia, a parcel of mined land in the village of Mostar that previously was home to over 1,200 people. The mined areas were part of a residential area and included land affecting the Mostar-Sarajevo railroad. Transportation routes will be re-established, a road will be built, and refugees who fled this area during the war will be able to return and cultivate the land near their homes.

The funds raised from last year's campaign will be used to clear an additional minefield in Bosnia this coming year. We will notify you of which project has received these funds in our mid-year update.

The 2005/2006 campaign will focus on Afghanistan. To welcome Farah as the new Youth Ambassador, AAM recently launched a special appeal to raise funds to clear minefields and support survivor assistance programs in Afghanistan in Farah's name. Since the late 1980s, there have been 14,000 reported landmine casualties in Afghanistan and since the fall of the Taliban, the mass return of internally displaced persons and refugees has led housing to become a vital need in this region. Half of the funds raised from this year's *That Landmine Thing* campaign will be used to help fund an Afghan demining team that will clear nearly 150,000 square meters of land that can then be used for home reconstruction.



Funds raised from *That Landmine Thing* will help us be able to remove signs like these in Bosnia.

Adopt-A-Minefield® is a campaign created by the United Nations Association of the USA, in partnership with the United Nations and Ted Turner's Better World Fund, to raise awareness of the global landmine crisis and engage civil society in clearing minefields, providing assistance to landmine survivors, and returning land to productive use. Since its launch in 1999, through direct donations, various grassroots and student fundraising campaigns, and our annual *Night of a Thousand Dinners* initiative, AAM has quickly become the world's largest nongovernmental funder of mine action. To date, we have raised over \$15 million, clearing 20 million square meters of land and assisting thousands of landmine survivors. AAM funds clearance and/or survivor assistance programs in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, Laos, Mozambique and Vietnam. [www.landmines.org](http://www.landmines.org).

## PEER SUPPORT for kids



In many developing countries, children with disabilities are often not allowed to go to school or participate in sports because of shame and fear of rejection. To alter this attitude and integrate child landmine survivors and amputees back into their communities, Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) has established social clubs exclusively for kids.

In Ethiopia, three such clubs have been organized throughout the capital, Addis Ababa. These groups offer kids an opportunity to play games, learn new skills and encourage one another while discussing common challenges in a secure and compassionate environment. The clubs meet once a month, and members enjoy playing sports (such as soccer and swimming), reading and writing poetry, and just hanging out.

One of the greatest benefits resulting from the social clubs is the increase in the number of young amputees enrolling in school. Fewer than 35 percent of eligible children in Ethiopia are now enrolled in primary schools. Some 5-6 million children still have no access to basic schooling. In addition, there are over 1.5 million disabled children, of whom only an insignificant number get the opportunity for even rudimentary education. Since the beginning of the youth group program in Ethiopia, many club participants have begun attending their local schools, some for the first time.



Young amputees such as Tomas Mekonnen (in front) compete in a game of tug-of-war at a recent youth social support group meeting in Ethiopia. Eleven-year-old Tomas lost his leg in an accident on his way home from school. LSN helped Tomas get fitted for a prosthesis and introduced him to a social club.

Founded by two American landmine survivors, Landmine Survivors Network links landmine survivors to healthcare and rehabilitation services, peer support, social and economic reintegration programs, and works to ban landmines around the world. LSN works with survivors to help them recover physically, emotionally, socially, and financially. Our focus on health, economic opportunity, and human rights is tailored to the special needs of each survivor. Over the past year, LSN has helped thousands of families affected by landmines, war and civil strife, provided more than 60,000 home and hospital peer visits, and helped launch hundreds of survivor-owned businesses. LSN is also a leader in the campaign to draft a U.N. Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. LSN works in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Jordan, Mozambique, and Vietnam. [www.landminesurvivors.org](http://www.landminesurvivors.org).

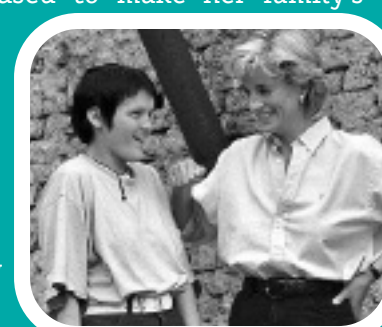
# A SPECIAL THANKS

to the Rotary Club of Maumee, Ohio! Rotary has long played a role in the mine action activities of Adopt-A-Minefield and Landmine Survivors Network. Clubs have shown their dedication and support by holding various fundraising events each year, lending their voices to *Rotarians for Mine Action*, and starting campaigns in their own communities. For example, the Maumee, Ohio Rotary Club joined forces with the First Presbyterian Church of Maumee to raise \$15,000 to help complete the clearance of BiH-058, the minefield adopted by the *That Landmine Thing* campaign. This is a great example of how an organization can inspire a community to affect significant global change in a tangible way. *That Landmine Thing* thanks you, Rotary.

## HAPPY 100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY ROTARY

Rotary International is currently sponsoring five young landmine survivors in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The children, ranging in age from 13-23, have been supported by funds raised through Rotary club's fundraising efforts around the world and through private donations. The funds are distributed to the young survivors through LSN, and each recipient meets regularly with an LSN Outreach Worker who checks on their development and assesses any needs of the survivor and their family. The approximately \$3700 (3000 EU) donated by Rotary per year helps each survivor's family pay for their school tuition and supplies, clothes and shoes, food, and materials to improve their home.

One of the young amputees supported by Rotary International is Mirzeta Gabeljic. In 1997, 15-year-old Mirzeta stepped on a landmine while walking home from school. The blast from the mine caused her right leg to be amputated. Since her accident, LSN and Rotary International have worked together to pay the tuition so that Mirzeta could finish secondary school. She finished three years at the local school of agriculture, and also recently completed training courses in computer programming and English. Rotary funds have been used to make her family's home more handicap accessible, purchase school supplies and books, and to allow Mirzeta to be fitted with a new prosthesis. She has expressed interest in starting a sitting volleyball club for women in her hometown of Tuzla and is involved with many local organizations that promote sports for people with disabilities.



Mirzeta Gabeljic met Diana, Princess of Wales in Bosnia-Herzegovina on her last humanitarian trip With Landmine Survivors Network, July 1997.

# spread the word and raise money to demine and help survivors

students attack landmines

Your donation will help mines be cleared and survivors to heal.

Demining is a dangerous and expensive business. After the ground is safe to walk on again, landmine-affected communities still need help. Adopt-A-Minefield and Landmine Survivors Network make sure that minefields are cleared, and survivors have the support they need to recover.

AAM clears mines so that roads can be rebuilt, land can once again be farmed, and refugees can return safely home. LSN assists survivors in obtaining appropriate medical care and rehabilitation, including prostheses, crutches and

wheelchairs, and helps survivors obtain jobs and fight for their human rights.

Funds raised through *That Landmine Thing* will clear minefields, purchase demining equipment, obtain livestock and seeds, and provide medical care and start-up funds for small businesses.

Below is a sample of some of the support *That Landmine Thing* is able to provide through the generous contributions of students like you.



crutches  
\$25



chicken feed  
\$50



prosthesis  
\$125\*



shoe repair supplies  
\$250



wheelchair  
\$500



clear minefield  
\$2 per square meter

\* The cost of prosthetics vary widely depending on country and severity of injury, and typically need to be replaced every three to five years. \$125 is the approximate minimum cost.

## Farah continued from page 1

While Farah's experiences were terrifying, she has put them to good use. In November 2004, Farah submitted her story to a writing contest sponsored by Simon and Schuster and ABC's "Good Morning America." From the 6,000 applicants, Farah was selected along with two other semi-finalists. She was paired with ghost writer Tamim Ansary to write a full length book manuscript of her life story, entitled *The Story of My Life: An Afghan Girl on the Other Side of the Sky*. After the manuscript was complete, America voted, and Farah won! Before she knew it, she was traveling around the country on a book tour organized by Simon and Schuster.

Farah describes the experience as a positive one. "People at the book signing were smiling and crying. After I spoke, they seemed hopeful. They were crying for me, but they were also crying for themselves, because they recognized the things that had happened in their own lives, the challenges they faced, and how they overcame them," recalled Farah. "The book is meant to inspire people, to make them understand and to make them believe in the possibilities of their own successes—to give them hope! I'm telling people about the value of education and letting them know that they can beat the odds and be victorious."

When Farah tells her story, people pay attention. Because of this, she is now able to use what she has learned to be a voice for other people threatened by landmines. In this capacity, Farah has agreed to be *That Landmine Thing's* new Youth Ambassador. Now, as a 17-year-old student at Chicago's Wheaton North High School, Farah conveys to students living in the U.S. how the reality of landmines affects youth around the world. Most Americans are not exposed to the actual consequences of landmines, Farah reminds us, but the problem is real and it affects real people.

As *That Landmine Thing's* Youth Ambassador, Farah was recently invited to the White House to visit with first Lady Laura Bush. "I was so excited. This was the greatest moment," said Farah. "[My] book was wrapped in tissue paper from Macy's. When she read the inscription on the inside, Laura Bush seemed really touched. Then I started to cry." The inscription read: *It was because of you I was able to come to America.*

Farah wants to use her book and her role as Youth Ambassador to convey what it's like to be a person with a disability. "I can't join and enjoy all of the activities other people can. I participate, but there are some limitations. It can make things not as much fun. Sometimes sitting and walking can be uncomfortable and hard to do. I'm nervous about dating. But when you have a disability, people think you're not smart or that your brain is affected. This bothers me because landmine survivors are capable of so much. I'm proud of who I am. My brain is not in my leg! My legs are not who I am. Who I am is in my heart and in my head!"

Looking ahead, Farah wants to go to college and become a

prosthetic maker. Once she learns the trade, she plans to use the skill to bring more and better prosthetic limbs to the people of Afghanistan. In the meantime, she is thankful that her work has led to special attention being placed on the landmine situation. Farah is already brainstorming about ways for young people to become active as a part of the *That Landmine Thing* campaign. "Students should start multicultural clubs for refugee kids—immigrants, refugees, and Americans can all learn from each other. Refugees feel isolated and lonely. It would be good if American students would reach out to them. They can help teach them English, and Americans can learn from a shared culture.... Even better is to incorporate this into a fundraiser to clear landmines and help survivors!"



17-year-old Farah Ahmedi signs copies of her autobiography on her book tour.

## F U N   A N D   F U N D R A I S I N G   I D E A S

benefit music concerts, plays, and talent shows ❁ car washes ❁ coin drives ❁ dress down days (for schools with uniforms) ❁ landmine awareness weeks / invite a landmine activist guest speaker ❁ peace garden "plant a flower, not a mine" ❁ raffles ❁ sale of cookbooks, garden stones, refreshments, gift cards, and candy ❁ silent auctions ❁ sleep-over events ❁ talent shows ❁ walk-a-thons ❁ donut sales

The award-winning play "Raising Our Voices" is available for production in your school or community. Contact: [info@ThatLandmineThing.org](mailto:info@ThatLandmineThing.org) for more information.

spread the word