

Diana, Princess of Wales

A Tribute to the World's Most Effective Volunteer

I first met Diana, Princess of Wales in the 1980s when I was Chief Executive of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf and she was Patron of the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf. We were introduced to deaf people at the same time, and we decided to learn sign language. She was keen to show deaf people that she cared and the ability to communicate with them in their own language was important to her. Communication was vital to her. She was able to communicate with almost anyone, whether a president of a country or a victim of a landmine.

The global ban on landmines is a fitting and lasting tribute to her life.

I started at the Red Cross in January 1991, just before the Gulf War, and was pleased to discover that Diana, Princess of Wales was a Patron of the Red Cross Youth. Although very committed, she had much more to offer to the Red Cross. At our first meeting, she expressed a desire to work with our international

programs and other programs in the U.K. I was fortunate to travel with Diana to many destinations, both in the U.K. and overseas.

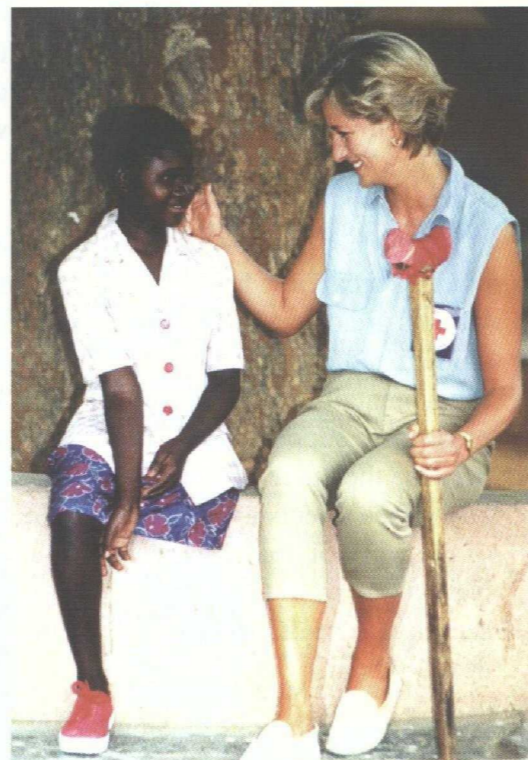
My first overseas visit with Princess Diana was when she came to meet us in Hungary on the Croatian border. There she talked to Croatian refugees, and I could not help but notice the effect she had on Pietre, a young boy separated from his parents. She was so caring and supportive of him that she left him feeling hope for the future. When I returned to the area for a second visit, I met with Pietre and he recounted the effect she had on him.

The highlight of our tours was the visit to Angola earlier this year. The Princess called me and wanted to talk about landmines. She had received a lot of information about landmines from the Red Cross and other organizations. She wanted to know whether the situation was a real tragedy or not. After I explained the issue, she was convinced that she could make a real contribution.

While the Angola visit was the first time that Diana

travelled in the capacity as a worker, the tour had a tremendous effect. I'm told that more than 90 million people watched the BBC documentary "Diary of a Princess." I suspect that this is a conservative estimate, as the documentary has aired three times in the U.K. The Princess often combined her empathetic nature with her ability to use the media to highlight a cause about which she really cared.

My last visit with her was to Washington in July, where we launched the American Red Cross Campaign for



Princess Diana comforts young landmine victim in Angola.

Photo compliment of British High Commission, Ottawa

The Time to Destroy These Weapons is Now

A roaring explosion on November 3 destroyed Canada's last operational anti-personnel mines in a vivid demonstration of Canada's commitment to the treaty banning these weapons.



Anti-Personnel Landmines. As the guest of honour at this fund-raising event, Princess Diana helped raise \$650,000. Who else could do that?

Had Princess Diana lived, she would have continued to help make the world a better place. Her love of people and her wish to focus on those causes that she thought important, drove her to do more.

At the time of writing, I can't really believe that she is dead and that she will not pick up the phone and chat about her latest idea. The world owes her an enormous debt. I will miss her greatly, as will the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement worldwide.

Mike Whitlam
Director General
British Red Cross

Nobel Peace Prize winner and International Campaign to Ban Landmines Co-ordinator, Jody Williams, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, Defence Minister Art Eggleton and members of Mines Action Canada gathered at Connaught Range near Ottawa to witness the event.

"It's important, if we are going to take a leadership role among the world community, that the Canadian Forces set an example," said Minister Eggleton. "Today we've brought the last 100 mines here to demonstrate this leadership by example."

In the past year, the Canadian military destroyed most of the 30,000 anti-personnel landmines it had left in its arsenal. Previously, in 1996, it destroyed 63,000 mines.

As permitted under the treaty, the Canadian Forces have retained fewer than 2000 anti-personnel mines for research and development of mine detection and clearance equipment, and for training military personnel in demining operations. Canadian military personnel will continue to train local people in demining techniques in places like Cambodia and Bosnia. In recent years, they have done similar training in Afghanistan, Kuwait and Rwanda.

Minister Eggleton said the Canadian Forces are sending an important message to their counterparts around the globe that the time to destroy these weapons is now.