

Speech by Dr. JANE COCKING, MAG Chief Executive

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am honoured to welcome you here this evening to celebrate an extraordinary achievement and to set a vision for the future. May I echo James' thanks to all those of you here who [as private individuals, representatives of governments, organisations, trusts and companies] have been part of the impressive progress that has already been made towards ridding the world of the cruel and vicious impact of land mines. Your Royal Highness we are deeply grateful for the strength and encouragement you are giving to this cause.

Two weeks ago I was talking to a woman in the village of Khazir near Mosul. She spoke of the pain of her neighbours who had recently lost two sons to improvised landmines but her own sense of relief and confidence now that the village had been cleared by MAG teams. The light of hope in her eyes was a joy to see.

The Mine Ban Treaty signed in Ottawa 20 years ago represented a collective commitment to rid the world of a dreadful plague. Its agreement owed a great deal to the personal intervention of Diana, Princess of Wales and we remember her especially this evening. In the past two decades there has been impressive progress towards the goals set in Ottawa. MAG alone has touched the lives of 18 million people. The work has often been difficult and dangerous and I pay tribute to my colleagues who have worked with a unique combination of bravery and diligence. We are committed to finishing the job.

Together those of us here this evening can make a pledge to ensuring that nobody has to live with the constant fear of a weapon that knows no distinction between those engaged in combat and a woman walking to a well to draw water. We will need generosity, creativity and tenacity but the link between our action and the improvement in the lives of thousands of others is a very close one.

We are delighted to welcome you here this evening. Our vision is a bold and ambitious one but it can be achieved – let us seize the challenge together.