

**Danny Glover Press Conference - Transcript
Sheraton Addis, 27 November 2004**

Bjorn Ljungqvist, UNICEF Representative in Ethiopia:

The reason why children are so much affected by landmines is for a number of reasons that we have learnt of. Very often you find children, they have special tasks. They are requested to herd animals, for example, that forces them to go into mined areas. They are very often called upon to collect firewood and water from far way places. They are looking for fruit. They are also as children very curious when they see these types of objects. They have the tendency to very easily to fall prey to these vicious devices that are being left as a legacy of war. And for that reason UNICEF from the very beginning we joined hands with the activists who wanted a complete ban on landmines. And throughout the '90s a lot of progress was made. The treaty came into force. A lot of countries have ratified and have actually made quite dramatic progress on many fronts. We can actually start to think about a landmine free world. And this is what we now have to bring home. We have to keep up the momentum. We have to make sure this becomes a reality especially for the children of this world.

So, from the point of view of UNICEF, especially UNICEF here in Ethiopia, we are extremely happy to be able to welcome our new goodwill ambassador Danny Glover. I think you have already recognized him. Danny Glover has just signed up as goodwill ambassador to UNICEF. He had initially explained to us that he would like to work specifically on children affected by armed conflict, and so this coincided very much with the Kenya Summit for landmines, which is going to start tomorrow in Nairobi – and we said let's use this opportunity to put the spotlight, with the help of you, our friends the journalists, on to this very critical issue. So we invited Danny to come here to Ethiopia and we took him out to the border with Eritrea where we still have very serious problems of landmines. So we were there yesterday. We spent the whole day there. Now I would like to ask Danny to say something.

Danny Glover

Thank you very much. Once again I want to reiterate the arms of welcome and thank you for abbreviating another schedule and coming here to be with us this afternoon. For the last almost decade I have been, either formally or informally, a part of the UN family. I served as goodwill ambassador for UNDP from 1998 to early this year when I decided I wanted to place more, to focus more my energy on children, and what is happening with children, particularly in developing countries. And as I was sitting here I was thinking there must be a reason why this extraordinary programme which allows artists such as myself to be a part of this process, to in some sense talk about the extraordinary things that the agencies such as UNICEF and other agencies do around the world. And it is in some way – we are touched in a different way. Is it perhaps that we are artists that we are touched? Is it perhaps that as artists we find a connection with the whole human struggle, dynamic and human pain, human suffering and even human joy, as I've experienced. And certainly this one trip, even though it was a very short trip, allowed me to experience numerous emotions of seeing young kids learn or become informed through the mine risk education

programme – to see young kids in school – who perhaps a year or 2 ago were not in school because of the conflict that ensued and disrupted their lives. So there were so many things that I saw – or to see a young girl who 2 years ago at the age of 12 stepped on a land mine and lost her leg. And to a young girl in the very prime of adolescence now has to deal for the rest of her life without full use of her physical capacity. And certainly I was moved by that and moved by her extraordinary courage to tell her story. From that to go to Zelambessa to be welcomed in this town where we see the worst bombing the worst destruction probably than any other city in the region, in another town or village in the region, and yet they had the courage and the wherewithal and to celebrate its rebuilding process – and to be part of that as we delivered an ambulance from UNICEF to them. So these were the range of emotions which certainly were inspiring – at the same time they provided me with a sense - in a singular and collective sense – that there are things in the world that I can do so even though – we often are moved by the travesty and tragedy of life, and how people overcome that- but those are the moments that will remain with me as I move forward and take on other assignments or other missions with UNICEF. The fact that what I take away from here is the indomitable spirit of people to move forward with their lives and the courage to use the resources available to them to transform their live and their children’s lives. To see young boys and girls sitting in the classroom together and dream about and help them dream about the possibility of a different future. Those are the things that carry me on and inspires – and hopefully that energy and that reservoir that they provide me will help me in some way shine as I tell their story in the world.

Bjorn Ljungqvist

So apart from going to the north, as you might have gathered Danny also had a chance to go to one of the schools, the day before yesterday, to visit the launching or set-up of the lessons for life for HIV which a number of partners in the Ethiopian Movement for Children are setting up for World AIDS Day. And tomorrow Danny will participate – maybe not fully, at the Great Ethiopian Run.

Danny Glover

If it was called the Great Ethiopian Walk I may be participating.

Bjorn Ljungqvist

I think the most important thing to remember here is that when the cease fire is being signed many of us believe the war is over. But for many in the communities, especially the children, that unfortunately is not the case. And the most obvious threat that remains forever and ever are these landmines. And we saw landmines virtually around the corner from these houses in he village- imagine living under those conditions. And then the schools are broken down it needs for years and years normal life and support for children will be disrupted. And many of these young people, or most of them will actually lose the chance for life – its very sad.

Tedla, Daily Monitor

I am glad to have you here. People here are also glad that you are here. I have written an article already about you. My question is not actually related to why you are here and your mission. Have you heard anything about Ethiopia while you were in America? And what was your feeling then and what is your feeling now?

Danny Glover

I heard a great deal about Ethiopia for all my adult life. Since I first ventured to taste the extraordinary Ethiopian cuisine when I was about twenty years old. That's some time ago. As a student - and I have had in the course of my life - I have met and had extraordinary discussions with Ethiopian artists, Ethiopian scholars, and so I have had some contact with Ethiopia. TO say in some sense reflect on what attitudes I had before coming here and what I see now, I don't think there is any change in what I have had. But it is also too soon. I have had such a short visit. For all that I read and for that I have discussed with others this is a short on sight visit for the first time. But when I am if what I experienced in Tigray and what I experienced in Zelambessa, and what I experiences in the school is any indication of the spirit of Ethiopian people then I am certainly in some sense overwhelmed and encouraged and feel proud to be here.

Paulette George, WFP

I just wanted to know what Mr. Glover and UNICEF thought would be some of the best ways to activate and mobilize some of the countries who have not signed the mine ban treaty to eventually do so. How can we get the momentum going on these countries so that eventually they will sign the treaty?

Danny Glover

You wonder why the largest producers of landmines have not signed the treaty because the produce enormous volumes of landmines. At some point - if not in the present then in the past - there certainly the production and sale of landmines could be very profitable in some sense. I am not sure we can do anything else except appeal to ones morality, and ones idea that in the service of peace, in the service of providing the atmosphere of rebuilding and reconstruction and reconciliation wherever there has been conflict then certainly the removal of landmines and having a strict application of the - applied to the destruction of landmines - the end of production of landmines would be the only thing that we could do. One of the themes around UNICEF is that no weapon should affect those after the war is over. The war is over, the war has been over, and it has affected enormously not only physically but psychologically, a community. The community has been devastated enough. We have to provide now the instruments to, the resources necessary to rebuild. If we cannot appeal to the morality and consciousness then I think we are in big trouble. But it certainly starts there.

Addis Admas

Do you have any plans to go to Eritrea to lobby them to sign and ratify the treaty?

Danny Glover

It was not part of the trip, the mission to go to Eritrea. I would welcome the opportunity to go to Eritrea. I remember after the conflict ended there were many very - there was a great hope for end of hostilities. Dr. King once said that peace was not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice. Tat we would hope that the presence of justice becomes the real foundation of lasting peace in the region and for both countries.

Bjorn Ljungqvist

And I just want to add that Eritrea has ratified the treaty, so that at least leaves one issue that these two countries can start talking around and I understand some contact has been made on that technical side – so that is a good sign.

ETV

What was your first initiative to come to Ethiopia and do you have a plan to come back?

Danny Glover

I have a plan to come back. We have a date for February next year in celebration of the birthday of someone who I admire greatly, Bob Marley. I plan to come back. The other part of the question was why Ethiopia. Well I had asked to be on my first mission when I was presented with the possibility of going to a country with a landmine removal programme there were several that I thought were possible. Angola was one, Mozambique was one. And Ethiopia was the other. So when the idea to come to Ethiopia – and I have always wanted to come to Ethiopia – presented itself I jumped on it.

ETV

I wanted to ask if you had a message that you wanted to convey in Addis Ababa or Ethiopia?

Danny Glover

Any additional message besides my presence here – I think my presence here – coming to Ethiopia – shows my great interest, demonstrates my great admiration for the Ethiopian people. That I wish all the blessings on this country as it turns a corner in its history – as President Mandela once said – and I am paraphrasing – we understand what a country is really about by the way in which it nurtures and treats its children. So if we keep that in mind as we say, ‘children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way.’ More than that whatever we can do, however we marshal up our resources and devote our resources to nurturing and making the future a better one for our children – the more that we create a new vision for this country and perhaps we also create a new example for the world.

Bjorn Ljungqvist

Can I add one last word as well? To round up let me come back to where we started and emphasize the importance of us to take this whole fight against landmines very seriously. This is an opportunity to do that again. The Ethiopian Government as Danny has said has taken the first broad steps towards fully ratifying this treaty. They have made the necessary legal provisions. They have passed it through the parliament. Still they need to complete the necessary documentation which includes concrete plans on how to destroy all landmines in the country and how to rid the whole country of landmines. And of course we are UNICEF- we would like to add there needs to be a plan for all children, all people affected by the threat of landmines really get the education and the information they need. I hope that you, members of the press, share in our concern you will help us to follow up and make sure that these steps are taken. I am sure that with the commitment that the government has already shown that indeed they intend to do so, but the quicker the better because it takes a long long time. Ten years is what normally they regard as necessary to rid a

country from landmines. And it would certainly take that time if not more in Ethiopia. And to get rid all the landmines as well is a tedious procedure. So I count on your help to encourage and challenge the government to take these necessary steps as quickly as possible. Thank you very much.

Indrias Getachew

If I could venture one final question for Mr. Glover. You had a chance to meet with some children, especially a young girl who had lost her leg as a result of landmines. I believe she had a message for you to present to the world regarding landmines. Could you share that with everyone?

Danny Glover

Sometimes in a child's heart they say something from their heart and despite her loss and the uncertainty of her future, when asked what message could be conveyed to those delegates meeting in Nairobi in a few days, she said, "I want to tell them not to pick it up." It was as simple as that. If I had anything to say to them its "don't pick it up."

So despite the tragedy of the whole situation she still had the presence of mind to say to those people who have the power to make sure that that does not happen to other children – to tell them not to pick it up.