

**REMARKS AT THE 19<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CLEARING THE PATH GALA  
BY THE MARSHALL LEGACY INSTITUTE  
OCTOBER 26, 2016**

Sri Lanka, a tropical verdant island, size of West Virginia, situated in the Indian Ocean, right in the middle of the Orient, where 21 million people live, together with nearly 6,000 – mostly wild elephants, and unique Sri Lankan leopards in the wild. Our sandy beaches are kissed by warm sea waters, and blue whales abound in the near deep sea. We have a recorded history of over 2,600 years, with 8 world heritage sites. And the world renowned high quality “Ceylon” teas, cinnamon, blue sapphires, rubies and graphite are also found in our land.

My country was heavily contaminated with mines and other improvised explosive devices due to nearly three decades of armed conflict between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, better known as the LTTE. This terrible conflict ended in 2009 with the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE, which has been identified as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States. But uncleared mines and unexploded explosives have posed a formidable challenge to the well-being of the people, especially in the north of Sri Lanka.

These hidden killers were traumatizing lives of the people, especially those working on the land. The Sri Lankan Army Demining Unit was leading the effort to locate and clear the mines and make Sri Lanka mine-free. Though the government was absolutely committed to freeing the land of this menace, we were handicapped by resource constraints and were in need of practical expertise and assistance. Among those international supporters in our cause, the Marshall Legacy Institute, the MLI, was at the forefront, playing a vital role in helping the Sri Lanka Army in this critical humanitarian effort. Since 2004, MLI has donated twenty six Mine Detection Dogs (MDD) to our Army to help find the mines and other unexploded explosives. In fact, one of the first mine detection dogs, named *Wyoming* was sponsored by the children of the state of Wyoming. That campaign was led by Senator & Mrs. Enzi, whose gracious presence today signals their resolute commitment to this great humanitarian programme.

Over the years, MLI has provided outstanding dog trainers too. The Mine Detection Dog teams that MLI has helped Sri Lanka Army to build, continue to work tirelessly and fearlessly to locate the mines for removal and destruction.

Sri Lanka is now happy to announce that seven years since the end of the conflict, 92% of the mine infected land has been cleared and declared suitable for human habitation and use. This, compared with other mine and unexploded ordinance infected countries in the world, is a major achievement in terms of the speed of clearance of unexploded explosives. A substantial part of the credit for this success must go to the MDD teams working in Sri Lanka, since, according to the Sri Lanka Army, MDD teams can clear mines and validate manually cleared areas quite speedily than many others.

We in Sri Lanka are therefore, very grateful to the twenty six dogs that worked in our country, eleven of which are still continuing their onerous task. They were and are our life savers and have really lived up to the reputation of a dog being a man's best friend.

In this context, we are very pleased that Mine Detection Dog *Alvin/Madjesty* and its handler, Sri Lankan Army Lance Corporal Nawarathne have been selected as the 2016 MDD team of the year. Alvin arrived in Sri Lanka in the year 2011 with five other fellow mine detection canines, and has done yeoman service on the ground. We are proud of *Alvin/Madjesty* who is present today among us with its handler, Lance Corporal Nawarathne. The Sri Lanka team to this event today is led by Brigadier Amith Senevirathna, Brigade Commander of Sri Lanka Army Engineers Humanitarian Demining Unit, which leads our fight against landmines very successfully.

We are grateful to the U.S. Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, and the countless private donors who have funded MLI's Sri Lanka program. Next spring, MLI is expected to donate four new MDDs to replace aging canine heroes worthy of well-deserved retirement. I would like to thank MLI and its indefatigable Board of Directors led by my friend Perry Baltimore and all of you here tonight for your kind and generous support to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is pleased to have hosted three MLI donor delegations to witness first-hand the fruits of your investment. We are confident that the assistance provided by MLI with your kind patronage will continue enabling us to complete the project of making Sri Lanka completely mine free, in the near future. Last but not least, as Sri Lanka is at peace now, visitors are flocking into my country, and may I invite all of you to visit Sri Lanka and bask in the beauty of my resplendent island and the friendship of our people.

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