

100 PROJECTS FOR PEACE PROPOSAL: STUDENTS FOR A MINE FREE WORLD

My name is Karyn Amira and I am a senior at Union College in Schenectady, NY. As an alternative to a political science thesis, I have chosen to start a Political Action Campaign. This will be a grassroots project to encourage the US government to sign the Landmine Treaty. This international treaty, if signed, will prohibit the use, stockpiling, transfer and production of landmines forever. I learned about this important issue while traveling through South East Asia after my term abroad. While in Cambodia, I learned that landmines are still present in many third world countries and kill innocent civilians every 22 minutes. They hinder agriculture and tourism. They cause family burdens and break international humanitarian laws.

Landmines obstruct peace, as they continue to kill innocent civilians even after the end of a war. Unlike armies, they do not abide by peace treaties since they are left in the ground, waiting for local men, women and children to step on them. Landmines are the unfortunate legacies of expired warfare.

The ideal ultimate goal of this project would be for the United States government to sign the Treaty to Ban Landmines. Of the 192 countries worldwide, 152 countries have signed the treaty. The United States is the only NATO country that has not. This goal has been pursued for nearly 10 years by 1,400 NGO's worldwide and is unlikely to happen within the next few months. Therefore, I do believe that a reasonable goal would be to get a couple hundred students to write advocacy letters to their government officials in support of this treaty. It is an interesting way to encourage political participation from college students and to learn about the grassroots effort. Another goal of this project is to raise money for landmine clearance in third world countries.

There is a future for this project. The effort to ban landmines has been a global movement since the early 90's. Governments around the world have acceded to the treaty by their own will and through public pressure. Because the United States has been the greatest supporter of mine clearance funding world wide, I do believe we will sign the treaty in the future. I believe that college students are an untapped resource that must be encouraged to participate in the political process. Previously, this issue has concerned mostly people of the older generation in the United States, specifically those who have fought in the Vietnam War, The Korean War, and even World War II. It is time to show that a new generation has taken notice of this international landmine crisis.

I have already designed a website about my cause, which can be seen at www.minefreeworld.com I have also set up an account with Google Analytics to see how many hits the site receives and what networks people are logging in from. The website provides easy to understand information about the international movement to ban landmines, the Landmine Treaty itself, reasons why students should support the treaty and how students can help out with the grassroots effort.

One page on the site, entitled "How You Can Help", instructs students on ways in which they can make a difference. The page provides links to Senator and Representative websites. From here, students can look up politicians in Washington that they wish to write letters to. It also provides a link that outlines a sample advocacy letter. These sample letters are provided by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (www.icbl.org). In addition to this, it encourages students to email me if they are interested in receiving up to date information about worldwide landmine policy. The ICBL and its annual Landmine Monitor Report provide recent news pertaining to all countries. Lastly, the site provides links to two online treaties. The first is the Youth Against War Treaty designed by the ICBL Youth Ambassador. The other treaty link is the People's Treaty, which is the online treaty provided by the ICBL. At the time of writing,

forty people have used my site to sign the Youth Against War Treaty, while twenty have used it to sign the People's Treaty.

Last term I did two campus demonstrations about the dangers of landmines and advertised my cause by hanging up posters around campus with a URL to my website. Two stories have been written about my project in our school newspaper. One was written by myself to raise awareness, the other was written by a staff writer as a news piece.

The remainder of the project will be focused on getting college students from other schools to view my website and write to their Senators. This needs to be done through advertisements on the Internet. Because my target audience in college students, I would like to advertise through the most popular college website, Facebook.com. I spent \$35 of my own money to conduct an advertisement trial run, which produced 16 hits to my site. I consider this a success. With more funding, I will do a significant amount of advertising and reach colleges across the country. I have selected certain colleges to advertise at due to their location, or their reputation for political participation. I used the online Princeton review to decide which colleges were ranked highest for political participation. I will choose a college or University from each state, as I am trying to reach a broad range of people. The outcome will be advertisements in all regions of the country. This means I will reach constituents from all Senators and Representatives in DC. A range of people will click on my ad, view my website, and participate in the movement, whether it involves writing a letter, signing an online treaty, making a donation or simply contacting me.

The other objective of this project is to raise a couple thousand dollars in donations for landmine clearance. Although it only takes \$1-3 dollars to build a landmine, it takes \$1,000 to clear one. Many third world countries cannot afford to do this themselves. As of right now, I am going door to door in dorms trying to collect a few dollars from each person. Although I have raised about \$400 in a few days, more funding will allow me to conduct alternative types of fundraisers on campus. I will give the money I have raised to an NGO that will go into landmine fields and extract the mines. The money will go to an NGO that works specifically in Cambodia since I have been there and feel a personal connection to the country.

The outcome of this project has two parts. The first is a college student oriented campaign to change landmine policy within the United States. The second outcome is college student political participation. It seems as though many college students, including political science majors, rarely take part in the political process. This project, while meant to change a national policy, will also encourage students to participate in a grassroots effort, perhaps for the first time. With the completion of this project, students will be able to say that they wrote a letter as a constituent, signed online treaties, assisted in humanitarian demonstrations, and donated to a peaceful cause.