



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Article 5: Clearing Mined Areas

Presented

By

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Standing Committee of the Meeting of the State Parties to
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Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

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Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Afghanistan signed and ratified the Mine Ban Treaty in 2003, less than two years after the fall of the Taliban. Standing here in 2011, our understanding of Afghanistan's problem of mine contamination and the necessary solution has developed and matured greatly since that time. There have been a number of essential developments that have enabled this.

For example, a consolidation of databases. Previously, separate databases kept the contamination data in silos, meaning that a clear overall picture of the contamination was not possible. The consolidation process led us through large fluctuations in the contamination figures. Furthermore, ongoing survey throughout the country, in combination with widespread return of refugees to the county has meant that a great deal of previously unknown contamination has been added to the database.

All this said, we are now confident that we not only have a clear picture of the problem, but also the systems in place to ensure this continues. This is not to say that we expect contamination figures to be static, or to only decrease, but we believe that an overall decrease is now possible if partners work together to focus on completing the task and the process is well-managed and coordinated.

There are six thousand five hundred and forty-five known minefields recorded in the database at present, covering six hundred and twenty-seven square kilometres of land throughout the country. Although much geographical progress has been achieved as a result of the clearance carried out by implementing partners, this is failing to produce an overall reduction in contamination due to the reasons described previously.

It is therefore clear to us today that we will need to apply for an extension to our 2013 Article 5 deadline. In fact, in March this year, we had a national milestone set to have achieved 70% of the overall clearance, which formed part of the Afghan Compact. Unfortunately, this was not met although the progress towards it should be recognized; in March the programme had achieved 69% progress towards that goal.

Nevertheless, we continue to believe that the end is in sight and the goal of eliminating the impact of landmines throughout the country is possible within a decade.

The reduction in casualty figures over the last ten years is a significant achievement of the programme and it is our hope that this would continue to decrease in the next few years. In the last Afghan calendar year, there were 550 casualties recorded - reduced from over 2,000 ten years ago. It is also worth noting that of the casualties in the last year, 59% of them were not due to landmines, but other explosive remnants of war.

Mrs Paikan will talk in more detail about victim assistance, but I would only briefly mention that we have now started a specific project, known as the Afghanistan Disability Support Programme to draw together all the work carried out through various ministries to ensure we have sustainable support systems in place to ensure the fundamental human rights of all persons with disabilities in Afghanistan are fully realized.

In terms of the solution, we believe that the key is for all partners to focus on completion of entire communities, districts and even provinces. At present there is only one province - out of 34 in the country - which has no known contamination. However, many provinces could be completed in one or two years, if the resources were focused in this way. Therefore, we would like to see provinces and regions cleared of all known minefields within the next few years.

We believe that this is possible, as long as the generous support of donors is maintained and all partners continue to focus on the goal. We would like to specifically thank donors who have kept supporting us continuously in mine action; Australia, Canada, the European Union, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.

I hope that you will continue to stay with us as we in partnership with the United Nations are determined to keep up the momentum, to ensure reaching our goal of putting an end to the innocent victims getting perished by landmines, and letting hundreds of thousands of struggling farmers in our Afghanistan make use of their agricultural land free of the fear of landmines.

Thank you,