



**Islamic Transitional State of Afghanistan**  
**Statement by Dr. M. Haider Reza**  
**Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs**  
**Standing Committee on Mine Clearance,**  
**Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies**  
**21-22 June 2004**  
**[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today to address the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies. I would like to use the time I have to brief you on the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance on Afghans; to tell you what my country is doing to continue the fight against these weapons; to update you on the progress we have made; and to ask those who can help us.

That Afghanistan has a significant landmine problem is well known. To underline the problem, let me give you a few numbers:

- Landmines and unexploded ordnance killed approximately 370 Afghans last year. That's more than one death a day.
- A further One Thousand plus Afghans survived their accidents with landmines and unexploded ordnance last year. Many are seriously injured.
- Half of these accidents involve unexploded ordnance.
- The names of the victims are added to the list of Afghan survivors, who now thought to number well in excess of 100,000 people, *according to our best estimates*
- About a third of these survivors are under the age of 18.
- As many as 10% are women and girls.

- Those who were killed or injured live in some of the 2,500 or so communities that are impacted by mines or unexploded ordnance.
- These communities are impacted by over 800 square kilometres of minefield and a further 500 square kilometres of battle area. This is a total 1.3 billion square meters of contamination, or 50 square meters for every Afghan man, woman and child.

It was with an understanding of this terrible legacy of conflict that my country took steps to join the Ottawa Convention in 2002. Since then, we have worked with our friends in the mine action community to plan our government's response to this crisis. This includes:

- A ten-year mine action strategy based on Convention timelines that was endorsed by the Government in March 2003. The strategy includes benchmarks and goals for coordination, clearance, mine risk education, monitoring and evaluation, and training.
- A 8,000 strong workforce involved in the coordination and implementation of mine and UXO clearance, risk education and related activities.
- A Mine Action Consultative Group -- which I have the honour of chairing -- that brings together representatives from Afghan Government ministries and departments concerned with mine action, mine action donors, UN agencies, and mine action implementing partners. The Consultative Group provides the United Nations Mine Action Center for Afghanistan, the ~~interim coordinator of mine action activities in Afghanistan,~~ <sup>the interim coordinator of</sup> mine action activities in Afghanistan, with policy direction.
- And finally, a commitment from the Government of Afghanistan to assume greater responsibility for the management of mine action in our country. On this last point, I am pleased to report that the finishing touches are now being applied to a draft plan to transition the day to day management of mine action from the UN to the Government. This plan will be presented to the Mine Action Consultative Group soon after my return to Kabul. ~~From these meetings~~ <sup>For these meetings</sup> This plan has been crafted with extensive support from the UN, the office of

legal affairs within the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force and my colleagues in the Ministry of Justice. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their assistance. In general terms, the plan calls for the establishment of a national mine action authority directly under the President of Afghanistan's Office.

As many of you know, the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan has existed for many years. Established in 1989, its member organisations -- Afghan and International NGOs -- have done a tremendous job over the years. ~~under the title of Mine Action of the United Nations.~~ Just as I gave you some numbers to describe the problem, let me now illustrate the past achievement using some numbers:

- The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan has grown from about 400 deminers in 1989 to over 8,000 people working in all aspects of mine action now.
- The Programme has cleared nearly 300 million square meters of minefield and a further 522 million square meters of battle area. During these operations, over 250 thousand land mines have been destroyed. A further 3.3 million items of unexploded ordnance have also been destroyed.
- 10.6 million Afghans have received mine risk education training from MAPA agencies.
- In 2003 alone, the Programme cleared 22.9 million square meters of minefield and a further 33.8 million square meters of battle area. And 500,000 Afghans received mine risk education training.

Before turning to the challenges ahead I would like to say thanks to all our friends in the donor community for the support they have provided over the years. Most recently, there has been tremendous support from: the European Commission, as well as a number of its member states, the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia.

And now on to the challenge. The challenge, ladies and gentlemen, is sustained multi-year funding to keep the 6,000 plus Afghans deminers and the almost 2,000 Afghan quality assurance, coordination, survey, monitoring, evaluation, training, and

mine risk education workers employed.

So far, it has cost the international community over 312 million dollars to conduct mine action activities in Afghanistan. As I mentioned before, during the 14 years over which these funds were expended nearly 300 square kilometres of minefield and about 522 square kilometres of battle area were cleared; a significant achievement. However, there remain 800 square kilometres of minefield and 500 square kilometres of battle area in Afghanistan today. If the history of the past 14 years tells us anything, it is that addressing this problem will cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The cost of not addressing it -- something that I know that our friends in the international community will not allow to happen -- is beyond calculation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your kind attention.