



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Statement

by

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Consideration of the General Status and Operations in Afghanistan

**7th Meeting of the State Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of
Antipersonnel Mines and their Destruction**

Geneva

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame the President,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As all Afghans, born and raised in Afghanistan, I know all too well the importance of mine action and its impact on the quality of life of the population and of future generations.

Afghanistan has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. However, we also have the distinction of having one of the oldest and largest national programmes in the world to tackle the contamination that is spread across 723 square kilometers of our land in 2,387 communities affecting 17% of the total population.

The Government strategy for mine action is based on the benchmarks set by the Ottawa convention, the national PRSP, known as the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Afghan Compact as well as the specific Afghan mine action target under the Millennium Development Goal which all set the framework for the mine action: 70% of the contaminated land have to be cleared by 2010 and the totality by 2013. This means clearing and releasing at least some 110 square kilometers per year in the next four years.

However, the Afghan government and Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan will be able to meet the target only with strong donor support.

Since 1990 the mine action programme has cleared 1.05 billion square meters of land, and destroyed 308,049 anti-personnel mines, 18,201 anti-tank mines and almost 6 million pieces of unexploded ordnance. In order to provide hazard warning for the safety of the local residents and to facilitate subsequent clearance operations a total of 12,621 minefields and battlefields have been marked. Out of this 1,558 minefields and battlefields have been marked since January 2005.

As said, 2,387 communities are affected by suspected hazardous areas. Of these communities, to date, 130 are considered high impact, 504 medium and the remainder face low impact. The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan has decreased the number of high- and medium-impacted communities by lessening the risk these communities face through a combination of clearance, markings and mine risk education. During the last 16 months the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan was able to completely address the problem in 122 communities and lower the impact in another 229 communities.

Afghanistan also appears to be making headway in its goal of reducing the number of mine victims not only with mine clearance but also with the help of mine risk education. The number of victims, dead or injured, has dropped in the recent months. An average of 62 Afghans are reported to fell

victim to mines and UXO each month in, a more than 50% decrease from just five years ago that can attributed to a combination of mine clearance and mine risk education.

Historically speaking, more than 16 million Afghans have received some form of mine risk education. The Mine Risk Education programme in Afghanistan addresses impacted communities with teacher training, mobile cinema, peer education programmes and other activities that encourage safe behavior among community members. Additionally, mine risk education is provided to returning Afghan refugees through UNHCR repatriation centers on or near the borders of Pakistan and Iran.

Through clearance and mine risk education, Afghanistan hopes to continue decreasing the number of innocent Afghans falling victim to mines or unexploded ordnance.

Our Mine Action Programme demonstrates an increased maturity and willingness to evaluate experience, build on successes, learn from mistakes, and undertake new approaches to address the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war with a fundamental commitment to the creation of nationally supported institutional capacity. In Afghanistan, the process of the transition from the UN managed programme to a national lead-one is underway. The handover to a national authority is to take place over a two-year period; however, the timeframe will be adapted to the requirements of the Government that has to accommodate this complex programme in its structure. Transition is a sophisticated activity that must consider political, administrative, financial, logistical, human resource and operational environment.

With the dedication of the mine action employees and the support of donor countries, Afghanistan will build its national institution, achieve its mine action goals and free the land of the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war.

Thank you for your attention.