



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Article 5: Clearing Mined Areas

Presented

By

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Meeting of the State Parties to
the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and
Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

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*Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning/ afternoon. My name is Dr Adrak and I am the head of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority of which the Department of Mine Clearance is a part.

The Afghanistan Mine Action programme is the oldest and largest in the world. In the past year we have made strenuous efforts to improve all aspects of our organization and operation so that we might achieve our vision of a mine-free Afghanistan by 2013. It is now my privilege to share with you the results of these efforts since we met in Jordan last year.

Since our last meeting in Jordan, we have removed one thousand eight hundred hazards and destroyed:

- Eighty thousand anti-personnel mines
- Nine hundred and twenty six anti-tank mines and
- One million explosive remnants of war.

This has released land back to more than two thousand communities and one hundred and forty eight districts have been cleared completely.

The number of anti-personnel mines destroyed so far in 2008 signifies more than a two hundred percent increase from 2007. We believe this increased efficiency is the result of energetic planning and the rule of law.

Our strategy for the next year focuses on certain key goals, including:

- 'Killing zones'
- Hazards within five hundred metres of a community and
- Areas of cultural or other benefit.

For example, *this year*, we cleared all known minefields in the district of the famous 'Buddhas of Bamyan'. Next year, in Bamyan we will complete the clearance of four minefields that directly contaminate our cultural heritage.

In the last year, we have also made progress in developing the national capacity and making the transition to Government authority. In December 2007, an inter-ministerial board was formed to oversee mine action and the merging of the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan and the Government's Department of Mine Clearance, or DMC began. DMC's responsibility is increasing with the aim that by 2013 they will fully assume responsibility for any residual mine and ERW threat that may exist. In the next year, this includes the establishment of a contracting office in DMC, naturally creating a structure for Government funding of demining.

The scale of the problem of mines in Afghanistan is great but it is not as great as it once was. The MAPA has been a massively successful programme. Between the years of 1988 and 2006, the MAPA removed twelve thousand minefields and cleared three hundred thousand anti-personnel mines and over seven million explosive remnants of war. Set against the 2007 high-point of remaining hazards benchmark, we have now removed forty nine percent of those hazards. This is an impressive achievement and we must maintain the momentum.

Our challenges to achieving this extend beyond the physical scale of the task. One of the major challenges we face right now is the rising insecurity as a result of Anti-Government Elements. Unfortunately, our demining teams have been increasingly targeted by these groups and as a result there is reduced access to many areas, some of which are heavily affected by mines.

However, we are not giving up or even slowing down in the face of such challenges. One of the strategies we developed and have expanded is community based demining. We believe this strategy will enable us to access areas which can no longer be effectively or safely reached using mobile demining teams from other areas. In addition, we believe that this will be cost-effective and easy to adapt so that once it has been developed in one community, it will be easily adapted by nearby communities. We call upon our donors to support this new initiative so that we can reach our goals.

As we look forward, we believe we should meet the Ottawa targets with continued and sustained support of 90 million dollars per year. However, if a short-term increase to 120 million dollars for two years were possible, we believe we could achieve the breakthrough we need to say this with confidence despite the challenge of tackling these last, always most difficult, miles in our journey.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to our donors, international partners and fellow Governments for their support over the past year. The great strides forward we have made would not have been possible without their continued support and belief in our ability to achieve a mine-free Afghanistan.

Thank you.