

Standing Committee on Mine Clearance and Mine Risk Education
May 10, 2006
H.E. Mahmoud Saikal
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Respected Co-Chairs, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am new to the field of mine action, but having been born and raised in Afghanistan, I know too well the importance of mine action and its impact on the quality of people's lives and livelihoods.

Afghanistan has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. More than 716 square kilometers of our land in 2370 communities have been contaminated by land mines.

The Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan, or the MAPA, started in 1990. This has since expanded to include more than a dozen partner organizations which employ more than 10,000 Afghans.

The MAPA has made remarkable progress, thanks to its long history and the passion of Afghan deminers. The MAPA reached an important milestone late last year by clearing its one billionth square meter of land. Today MAPA can boast 1.05 billion square meters of land cleared of mines and unexploded ordinances. It has destroyed almost 329,000 anti-personnel mines, well over 18,000 anti-tank mines and almost 7 million pieces of UXO's.

In order to provide immediate hazard warning for the safety of the local residents and to facilitate subsequent clearance operations a total of 11,743 mine and UXO contaminated areas have been marked. Out of this a total of 816 areas have been marked since January 2005.

Afghanistan also completed the first nationwide Landmine Impact Survey last year. The survey being continuously updated by Landmine Impact Assessment Teams working throughout Afghanistan. The survey will help the MAPA to better priorities land that needs to be cleared and better serve Afghans suffering from the presence of mines. The MAPA will now be able to measure its success not only in terms of the number of square meters cleared or devices destroyed, but also by the direct impact and benefit to communities.

The survey has pinpointed 2,370 communities affected by suspected hazardous areas. Of these communities to date, 160 are considered high impact, 493 are medium and the remainder face low or no impact due to markings warning of the presence of mines or UXO's.

The MAPA has decreased the number of high and medium impacted communities found in the initial survey through a combination of clearance, markings and mine risk education. During the last 16 months the MAPA was able to lower the impacts of mines and UXO's in 211 communities and the mines and UXO problem of 57 communities has been completely addressed.

Afghanistan is also making headway in its goal of reducing the number of mine victims with the help of mine risk education. The number of victims, dead or injured, has dropped from a high of 150-300 per month in 2002 to 70-100 in recent months.

The MAPA targets impacted communities with teacher training, mobile cinema, peer education programmes and other activities that encourage safe behavior among community members.

Additionally the MAPA provides mine risk education for returning Afghan refugees through UNHCR repatriation centers on or near the borders with Pakistan and Iran.

Through clearance and mine risk education, Afghanistan hopes to continue decreasing the number of innocent Afghans falling victim to mines or UXO's. However we will not rest until all Afghan can walk and work without fear of becoming a victim.

With the dedication of the MAPA employees and the support of the international community, Afghanistan hopes to achieve its obligations for Mine Clearance and Mine Risk Education by our deadline of 2013.

Thank you.