



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Article 5: Clearing Mined Areas

Presented

By

The Permanent Mission of Afghanistan in Genève

Standing Committee of the 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

Geneva, November 2010

*Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished colleagues,*

As you are all aware, Afghanistan has suffered many years of war and indeed armed conflict is still ongoing in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, our government, with the support of our international partners, is making progress towards Afghanistan becoming a post-conflict country.

The Government of Afghanistan has requested the United Nations Mine Action Service to be responsible for the coordination of mine action in the country until 2013 and may seek continued UNMAS support beyond that date. The UNMAS project is known as the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan, the MACCA. In the last two years, the MACCA has worked in partnership with our own Department of Mine Clearance.

The destruction of all known stockpiles was achieved in 2007 and the Ministry of Defence now manages the destruction of previously unknown stockpiles that have been discovered since then.

The clearance that has been completed to date currently stands at five thousand seven hundred and fifty-two (5,752) minefields and six hundred and twelve (612) square kilometers of contaminated fields.

The major challenge for the programme currently is more hazards being found. We believe this is due to shifting patterns of settlement, <sup>continuous</sup> ~~continues~~ flow of returnees and increased development in the country. It is important to note that this is not newly laid minefields, but previously unknown hazards.

This means that the progress towards both the Mine Ban Treaty and the national 'Afghan Compact' towards total clearance are not in line with the expectation given the large amount of clearance that has been conducted by the implementing partners.

At present, the progress towards the Mine Ban Treaty stands at 48% in terms of area. The Afghan Compact requires 70% progress towards the Mine Ban Treaty by March 2011 – at present we are 69% towards the 70% goal in terms of area. We can clearly see that this goal will not be reached in four months' time.

Afghanistan is trying its utmost to tackle these challenges and is currently adhering to Actions 14-17 of the Cartagena Action Plans in the following ways:

- Precise perimeters and locations of all known hazards have been identified through initial and ongoing surveys and are captured in the National database which is continually updated and managed.
- Reports are submitted against Article 7 with information as required.

- Efforts are currently being made to outreach into Government processes to ensure mine action is included in national development and reconstruction plans.
- National standards have been developed and external monitoring shows an extremely high standard of adherence.
- National standards also include policies and procedures for technical and non-technical release of land. These are currently being reviewed by the programme in light of new research undertaken regarding land rights.
- Annual reports and plans are developed based on national strategy and policies, which are reviewed in light of the changing situation and data available, are regularly published and available on the MACCA website.
- Implementing partner projects are developed in coordination with MACCA/DMC, who also review proposals on behalf of donors.

There are currently more than 14,000 mine action staff employed throughout the country by the various implementing partners. Mine Action continues even in areas where many think it is not possible to work; largely due to the long-standing neutral, humanitarian reputation the programme has established for itself in the last twenty years.

Community based demining has grown significantly in the last year, increasing the active involvement in needs assessments, planning and prioritisation of activities by affected communities.

Two surveys in the last year have also been carried out to ensure the programme is acutely aware of the views of the communities they are working with – one regarding 'Knowledge, Attitudes, Practice and Belief' in terms of mine action and the other one examining the connection between mine action and livelihoods.

In order to reduce the number of casualties whilst the clearance is ongoing, Mine Risk Education is carried out in many forms throughout the country. This is led by the Ministry of Education and examples of the progress in this area is that Mine Risk Education is now incorporated into the national curriculum and is included in textbooks, ensuring at-risk groups such as children are provided with age-appropriate education. Other special programmes include those developed specifically for returnees and refugees.

Mr. President,

It is our hope that soon we will reach the 'end point' of discovery of new hazards to prevent flat-lining. We believe Afghanistan can past this state of continuing unknown hazards discovery undermining the progress of clearance, if we can increase the demining capacity and work with communities and Community Development Councils to bring districts and regions to a managed end state of no impact. In the course of this work, some hazards will be registered for later clearance.

Of course, for this to be achieved, significant increases in donor funding is needed. Looking to the year ahead we are facing a decrease in our funding which – if no further funding is provided - will result in the loss of 48 demining teams and a reduction in the coordination function. Whilst we are deeply appreciative for all the donor support to date, we appeal to donors to consider an increase that will enable the programme to bring the hazards to a level which can be managed by a national Government authority.

Thank you for your attention.