

**Notes for ICRC statement on Afghanistan's Extension Request,
12th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention
Geneva, 3 December 2012**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) supports Afghanistan's request for a ten-year extension to fulfil its Article 5 obligations. We also wish to congratulate Afghanistan and its partners for presenting an extremely clear and comprehensive Request, which in the view of the ICRC should be viewed as a model by other requesting States Parties in future.

The Extension Request clearly demonstrates that Afghanistan's clearance programme is making considerable progress towards ridding the country of anti-personnel mines. Clearance has led to significant socio-economic benefits, while casualty rates have dropped to one-fifth of rates recorded 10 years ago. It nevertheless remains concerning that 409 casualties were again recorded in 2011, which, coupled with unrecorded casualties, confirms that weapons contamination in Afghanistan remains of major humanitarian concern.

According to its Extension Request, Afghanistan and its partners have secured the release of over 432km² of suspected hazardous areas to date, leaving almost 532km² of contaminated land remaining, including almost 258km² of anti-personnel minefields. The Request acknowledges that new hazards are likely to be reported in the two-year survey that commenced in May 2012, but Afghanistan intends to review its work plan every six months, as new information is received.

The ICRC agrees with Afghanistan that it is not possible to consider the anti-personnel minefield problem in isolation from anti-vehicle and battlefield contamination, and that other forms of contamination, which impact on communities to a greater extent than some anti-personnel minefields should be cleared first. The ICRC has regularly reiterated its position that "from a humanitarian perspective, prioritisation of demining efforts should be made on the basis of the humanitarian impact of the contaminated land and the risk undertaken by the civilian population and not only on the basis of legal obligations to clear contaminated land".¹

As the Extension Request has identified, much of the remaining hazardous areas have been assessed as low impact, which attests to the effectiveness of clearance efforts to date. Afghanistan has nevertheless identified 710 areas (representing 27% of the total remaining contaminated area) with an "Ottawa Ranking" of 1 or 2, where casualties have been recorded.

Subject to overriding security concerns (which we commend Afghanistan for trying to address, for example through Community Based Demining), we hope that Afghanistan will proceed swiftly with clearance of the remaining areas with an "Ottawa Ranking" of 1 or 2, as well as prioritising areas subject to resettlement of populations.

In this regard, it is unclear from the Extension Request how clearance support to infrastructure and development projects fits within the clearance prioritisation criteria. The Request notes that demining and ERW clearance support to major infrastructure projects has sometimes diverted resources from the clearance of other areas, but that another 43 important development projects are listed for demining and ERW clearance support in the future. The ICRC would therefore welcome further information on how Afghanistan intends to balance the use of resources for such important projects, which are deemed vital for the country's economic development, with clearance of areas where victims have been recorded.

¹ ICRC statement at the June 2010 Intersessional Meetings.

We would also like to add our voice to the concern expressed by the President of the 11MSP in the Analysis document about use of terminology such as "impact free" in Afghanistan's Extension Request, which is not consistent with fulfilment of the obligations contained in Article 5.

Finally, we would like to commend Afghanistan for including clear and specific milestones in its Extension Request, which will greatly assist it and the States Parties in assessing progress throughout the extension period. We recommend that the decision by the States Parties take note of these milestones (for example by annexing them to the decision), and ask Afghanistan to regularly report on progress against these milestones throughout the extension period. In addition, we would suggest that the Decision ask Afghanistan to submit a revised clearance plan and budget by the 2014 Review Conference, once the national survey is complete. This would allow the clearance plan and budget to incorporate a more precise estimate of the remaining contamination following the survey, and adapt to developments in funding and the security situation, which are both currently unpredictable.

Once again, we would like to congratulate Afghanistan and its partners, both for their achievements to date in tackling weapons contamination and for a very thorough and well-reasoned Extension Request. In the ICRC's view, if Afghanistan, in the face of ongoing armed conflict, can make such significant headway in fulfilling its Article 5 obligations, other States Parties can learn from Afghanistan's experiences and also improve progress towards fulfilling their own obligations.