



# **Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**

**Opening Speech by H.E. Mr Wais Ahmad Barmak  
State Minister for Disaster Management  
&  
Humanitarian Affairs**

14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of States Parties

Geneva

30 Nov – 4 Dec 2015

H.E. Bertrand de Crombrughe, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations and President of the Fourteenth Meeting of the States Parties,

Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, I would like to welcome all delegations from States Parties and States not Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, representatives from United Nations, international organisations and other participants. It is my great pleasure to attend and represent Afghanistan at the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of States Parties to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention. It is of a special importance and value for me, as I am attending the first formal gathering of the States Parties since the Maputo Action Plan 2014 – 2019 was adopted during the third review conference.

Afghanistan remains committed to the Maputo Action Plan to ending the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines for all people for all time, and we will keep our continued efforts with support from our international partners to make Afghanistan landmines free by 2023 by following the norms of the convention and those actions endorsed in the plan by the states parties.

I have recently assumed my current assignment as the State Minister for Disaster

Management and Humanitarian Affairs and the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) will be one of the priority national programmes under my leadership and the strategic focus areas in addition to designing a National Disaster management and Risks Reduction programme and humanitarian responses linked up with the priorities for action of the Sendai Framework adopted by the international community in 2015.

More than three decades of armed conflict in Afghanistan have rendered our country one of the most affected in the world by landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), including improvised explosive devices (IEDs). While a tremendous effort by the humanitarian community has seen much contamination removed, ongoing military clashes are resulting in new contamination, adding to the lethal legacy of previous conflicts.

Since the creation of Afghanistan Mine Action Programme in 1989, we have successfully cleared vast areas in the country, reducing the impact of mines and ERW contamination on the lives and livelihoods of civilians. Between 2001 and 2013, the number of casualties fell significantly from a monthly average of 175 to 36.

Since 2013, I am sad to say that the number of casualties has risen again to a monthly average of 102 during 2015. The cause of these casualties is primarily not the legacy of past conflicts and the conventional landmines, which they left behind, but rather, it is the fighting of recent years creating new ERW and new forms IEDs.

Since its establishment, the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan has cleared nearly 78 percent of known “legacy” contamination – the mines and ERW, which resulted from the pre-2001 conflict. The remaining 21 percent includes 4,363 identifiable mine and battlefield hazards covering a total area of 557.6 square kilometres.

From post 2001, Afghanistan have faced a number of additional challenges and the true scale of which is yet to be fully understood. Of particular concern is the use of pressure-plate Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) by insurgent forces. These devices are most often designed to explode by the contact of a person and are therefore anti-personnel landmines under the terms of the Ottawa Treaty. They are indiscriminate and illegal weapons.

Available data suggests that the increasing use of pressure-plate IEDs is the greatest challenge facing the mine action sector in Afghanistan today. During the first six months of 2015, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported 242 incidents in which these weapons killed or injured 506 civilians. This represented a 38% increase on the same period in 2014.

The scale of mines and ERW problem in Afghanistan is in sight. During the 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting of States Parties, Afghanistan requested for an extension to its deadline for clearance of antipersonnel mine contamination from 2013 to 2023. This was granted following the development of a ten-year work plan that would realise that goal as well as clearance of

all known anti-tank mines and legacy ERW. In 2015, that end is showing signs of drifting out of sight.

Significant financial support has gratefully been received from the international community for more than two decades, however during the last two years it has fallen short of the level required to achieve the operational targets of the Extension Request Work Plan. While we are committed to working hard and be more efficient with the available resources to achieve our set targets, the overall decline in the international aid for the country and in particular for the mine action programme risking our achievement of the targets and meeting the deadline in 2023 for which we believe that continued donors support to the mine action programme will be essential, specially when Afghanistan faces new mine action challenges as consequences of continued conflicts and military activities launched by all anti-government elements.

As I have noted, aside from the funding decline, increasing insecurity is another external factor that can affect the implementation of the convention. Since 2010, 79 demining personnel have been killed and 119 injured as a result of direct and indirect attacks by insurgent groups. As a risk mitigation factor, we are broadly using community based demining approach for delivery of demining services in insecure areas but the complication and nature of insurgency in Afghanistan have always remained as a big challenge ahead of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan.

**Dear distinguished friends;**

As you all know, landmines are able to stay hidden not only to terrorise the lives of people in the times of war but also in the times peace – they threaten a child, an old woman and man whether involved in a conflict or not – create for them similar risks. Afghanistan will take some necessary and practical steps to play its own role in promoting the universalization of the convention through a number of initiatives and processes through which and with which Afghanistan is associated with, a party to and or a member of.

Taking this opportunity I would like to express my sincere appreciations and congratulations to Algeria and Belgium for respectively presiding the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Meetings of States Parties.

I would like to thank all of you who have contributed to the initiation and implementation of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention and other relevant international laws. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation for all mine action donors who have supported Afghanistan in fulfilment of its obligations in relation to the anti-personnel mine ban convention. The Government and people of Afghanistan will always remember your support and through this conference I would like to call upon all donor representatives to maintain your financial support to mine action programme to enable us deliver on the targets we have set to achieve by 2023. I would also like to extend my gratefulness for the United Nations Mine Action Service for providing its technical assistance in a number of areas including playing a crucial role in standards setting and resources mobilisation, advocacy, overseeing and providing quality assurances, and

assisting in building national capacities for humanitarian demining operations in my country since 2002.

I wish you all well and successful conference for all participants coming together in Geneva representing States Parties, donors and our technical partners supporting our efforts to make our countries landmines, ERW and IED free to ensure we are on the path of achieving our sustainable development goals.