



**Statement by Dr. M. Haider Reza, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan
The Fifth 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
15 September 2003**

Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers and especially the Government of Thailand for organising this very important event here today. I also like to mention that I am honoured to be here to address this distinguished gathering.

Mr. President,

The Afghan government became the 126th state to ratify the Ottawa Convention, depositing its instrument of ratification on 11 September 2002. On 1 March 2003 the Treaty entered into force in Afghanistan, and 1 September 2003 the Article 7 Report was officially submitted to the Secretary-General of the UN.

Afghanistan by becoming a State Party to the Convention has committed itself to meet its obligations under the Convention and has taken some important steps in order to fulfil its mandates. Knowing its technical and resource limitation at present time, the Afghan government actively supports the UN Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan.

In order to ensure the effective coordination of mine action in the country, a Mine Action Consultative Group being an inter-ministerial and donor support body, has been set up under the National Development Framework of the Government. The Consultative Group is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its members are Government ministries concerned with mine action, the Department of Disaster Preparedness / Department of Mine Clearance, donors, UN agencies and mine action implementing partners. The Consultative Group is also overseeing the implementation

of the Ottawa Convention in Afghanistan.

The regular meeting of the Consultative Group has proven to be a good tool for the government to acquire the information and in recognising its immediate needs to prepare its concerned ministries and institutions to accept the responsibilities under the Convention. Initially it was planned that the Government should take over the programme in its entirety by the end of 2005, but now it seems possible that the transfer of responsibilities in running the mine action programme from the UN to the Government will take place much sooner than the set deadline.

The presence of millions of landmines in Afghanistan is a major obstacle in the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country. The danger of landmines hampers the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction and it also slows down the return of refugees and IDPs back to their place of origin. The delay in the return of refugees creates problems for the refugees themselves and host countries worldwide. It also slows down economical growth that Afghanistan would have otherwise. In spite of certain degrees of success that the demining programme had, the average number of people who fall victims to landmines reaches 100 or more per month. The high incidences of landmine injuries underline the great need not only for mine clearance but also mine awareness programmes.

The mine action has had its achievements from the very outset during the last 14 years, but it will still require at least another 10 years to rid Afghanistan from the problems of landmines. Based on the 10-Year Strategic Plan for demining programme in Afghanistan, in the first five years, until 2007, priority will be given to areas which will have greater impact on the economical and resettlement of the population. In the second five years, until 2012, areas of medium and low impact will be cleared of landmines. The Afghan government recognises the importance of assisting those victims of anti-personnel mines or UXO, both through emergency and longer term medical assistance, but also through rehabilitation programmes that help them to deal with their injury and embark on new livelihoods.

Mr. President,

For the current year the mine action programme for Afghanistan faces some financial difficulties which can retard the demining process. So far only one-third of the

forecasted budget of US\$ 79 million for 15 months, has been received, one-third is still in the form of pledges and another one-third is in shortfall. Nevertheless I would like to thank all the donors for their overwhelming support for mine action in Afghanistan.

Demining is not an easy job. It requires funds, expertise, patience, dedication and time. At the same time it is a great service to mankind. For us, as a nation, in order to fulfill our mandate and make Afghanistan free of landmines, we need the resources to carry out the job effectively and timely. Time is escaping and we would like to call on States Parties, and organizations, such as NATO to consider assisting us in destruction of stockpiles, to ensure that it can be completed in the 4 years required.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We want the refugees to come home, we want our people to be safe, we want our children to go to school. We want Afghanistan to stand strong among the nations of the world. Together we can achieve. For us all its an obligation to deliver, it is a responsibility to serve human beings and together we will prevail.

Thank you.