



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Assisting the Victims

Presented

By

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Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

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*Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good afternoon. In the past year, we have taken some major steps forward in the development of our victim assistance programme and it is my privilege today to present them to you.

Some of the most significant achievements have been in the transition of responsibility for victim assistance from the UN to the Government of Afghanistan. Last year, victim assistance was officially integrated into the broader disability sector activities within the Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled. My ministry has the lead role for advocacy and monitoring of disability services and support. I am passionate about working with and for people with disabilities and our partners to build capacity within the Government, raise standards of care and develop new initiatives to ensure persons with disabilities including landmine survivors in Afghanistan receive the care and respect they deserve.

In October of this year, I chaired the first inter-ministerial meeting on disability, demonstrating how ministries are working together for the successful implementation of the Afghanistan National Disability Action Plan and our Mine Ban Treaty obligations. In the same month, Government officials, civil society and NGOs joined together to develop regional action plans to ensure that this plan is meaningful in every corner of our country. We are also grateful to the EU and the Implementation Support Unit for technical support to develop a monitoring mechanism for the Afghanistan National Disability Action Plan.

In terms of a legal framework, we have made good progress towards passing a National Law for Persons with Disabilities. This has now been approved by Parliament and will soon be signed by the President and become law.

On an international level, the translation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been made into local languages and has been presented to Parliament for further discussion.

We believe that it is important that persons with disabilities not only have their rights respected, but are valued and respected throughout society. With this aim in mind, we have just completed the integration of disability awareness and mine risk education messages into the National Education Curriculum.

In addition, we are currently developing a 'Terminology Guide' to ensure valuing language is used in relation to persons with disabilities in all public documents and media.

We also recognize the importance of providing excellent standards of trauma care and rehabilitation and in the last year we provided international standard training to 282 health clinic heads and 330 newly graduated doctors in trauma care, disability and physical rehabilitation issues.

In terms of access to services, in the first quarter of 2008, a total of 22,096 people with disabilities received physiotherapy and 1,665 received orthopedic services through the 14 orthopedic workshops covering a total of 28 provinces in Afghanistan. Furthermore, this month, we held the second national community based rehabilitation conference bringing together Government, NGO implementers, and specialists in CBR to discuss issues of collaboration and expansion of programme activities.

Up until last year, we only had a 2 year Physiotherapy course, but this year, supported by the Physiotherapy Institute, this was extended to 3 years, making it a diploma level course. This will raise us beyond our current level of 245 well-trained physiotherapy staff.

In terms of psychological and social support, this year the Ministry of Public Health established a Mental Health Department. There are now five mental health clinics operative in Kabul alone and in 2008 we conducted training in psychosocial issues with health staff in ten further provinces.

There are also a number of NGOs which run micro-credit programmes for persons with disabilities in Afghanistan and we fully support these efforts to improve their economic independence.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of our donors, international partners and my colleagues in the various ministries who have made this progress possible. The large population of mine survivors and other persons with disabilities in Afghanistan combined with the country's turbulent history and challenging present situation means that there is still a lot to be done. However, I hope that I have outlined for you today that progress is being made and with the continued support of the international community, I believe that we can make a significant improvement to the quality of life of every mine survivor in Afghanistan. That is our vision.