

Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction
May 11, 2006
H.E. Mahmoud Saikal
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world and has the biggest and oldest mine action programme in the world.

Although the mine action programme was well underway before Afghanistan signed the Ottawa Convention in March 2003, the Convention has given the programme a blueprint for what must be accomplished over the next few years. Afghanistan is now feeling the pressure not only from the international community in light of our obligations under the Convention, but also from the Afghan People.

In Afghanistan 56 different types of mines lay beneath the soil and locating and destroying the stockpiles of anti-personnel mines that have accumulated throughout the country over the past two decades is a major challenge.

In some ways, the stockpiles are even more difficult to locate than the mines in the ground. We can not rely on metal detectors or mine sniffing dogs. Instead we have to convince local commanders and villagers to voluntarily give up their stockpiled caches of weapons and or disclose their locations. In March of this year for example, a huge stockpile was found which contained 15000 anti-personnel mines, 10,000 anti-tank mines and more than 80 tones of TNT.

Despite these challenges we are committed to meeting our obligations by March 2007. To do so, in September 2004 we established the Ammunition Steering Committee (ASC).

Chaired by the Ministry of Defense, the ASC began a nationwide survey of explosive remnants of war, including all mine stockpiles in December 2004. The survey is ongoing across Afghanistan in conjunction with Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme, a United Nations supported Programme of demobilization of ex-combatants.

As the deadline for the destruction of all stockpiled anti-personnel mines approaches, we can say with confidence that all known stockpiles in Afghanistan are or will be destroyed by our deadline of March 2007. However, because of various factors like the ones mentioned above, there exists the possibility that more stockpiled mines will be discovered after March 2007.

Despite the challenges Afghanistan can still boast of great progress in this area. Since signing the Convention, 65,973 mines have been destroyed. 44,819 mines have been destroyed since the beginning of 2005.

We are thankful to the support of the international community for assisting us achieve this progress. We are hopeful that this assistance will continue in the future so that we can meet our obligations and deadlines under the Convention.

Thank you.