



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Article 5: Clearing Mined Areas

Standing Committee of the 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

Geneva, May 2009

Co-Chairs

*Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning/ afternoon.

The concept of humanitarian mine action was developed in Afghanistan, however, we are determined to make mines a part of Afghanistan's history as soon as possible. To this end, we are continually working to improve all aspects of our organization and operation so that we might achieve our vision of a country free from the threat of mines by 2013.

In the last year, we reduced the number of mine impacted communities from two thousand three hundred and fifty-four to two thousand and twenty three and the contaminated area from seven hundred and five to six hundred and fifty eight square kilometres. This is through a combination of increased efficiency of operations, improved planning, data management systems and the rule of law which has enabled better access to contaminated land.

Our strategy for the next year focuses on certain key goals, including:

- 'Killing zones'
- Hazards within five hundred metres of a community and
- Areas of cultural or other benefit.

For example, *last* year, we cleared all known minefields in the district of the famous 'Buddhas of Bamyan'. This month, we began operations in Bamyan again following the winter break and should complete the clearance of four minefields that directly contaminate our cultural heritage sites.

Our challenges to success extend beyond the physical scale of the task. One of the major challenges we face right now is the rising insecurity as a result of Anti-Government Elements. Unfortunately too, our demining teams are increasingly

targeted by these groups and as a result there is reduced access to some areas which are heavily affected by mines.

However, we are not giving up in the face of such challenges. One of the strategies we developed and have expanded is community based demining. This strategy is enabling us to access areas that can no longer be effectively or safely reached using traditional mobile demining teams. Community Based Demining projects are currently running in the three volatile districts in the provinces of Kunar, Helmand and Uruzgan, with another team now being trained in Kandahar.

We have calculated what is currently needed to successfully fulfil the clearance obligations under Article 5, which totals just over five hundred million dollars over the next five years in bilateral and multilateral funds. We have the technical ability to achieve this goal. Our only barrier is sufficient funds to get the job done. For this year ahead, we are underfunded by approximately seventeen million US dollars.

As the Government, we are also making our best efforts to support mine clearance with our National budget. This year, we have committed two million six hundred thousand dollars to fund the mine clearance in a site where foreign investors are interested in developing a copper mine. This will in turn provide hundreds if not thousands of jobs and a long-term improvement in our country's economy.

Our Government is fully committed to the Ottawa Treaty and has successfully fulfilled all our reporting requirements on all relevant aspects to date, most recently the latest Article 7 submission.

While I thank all the donors for their generous donations to mine action in Afghanistan all these years, I call upon our current donors and those who have

not supported us thus far to join with us so that we might fulfil the vision of a mine free Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Thank you.