



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration

Presented

By

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*Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am honoured to represent Afghanistan's progress towards the Cartagena Action Plan. Following my involvement in the Cartagena Summit in November, I have been working with my colleagues here to meet the challenge to provide age-adequate and gender-sensitive assistance to mine survivors and other people with disabilities through a holistic and integrated approach.

As a first step, we have had the Cartagena Action Plan translated into the major national languages of Dari and Pashto to enable discussion among my Government counterparts and other stakeholders.

The next step will be the integration of the Cartagena Action Plan into the current policies, such as the Afghanistan National Disability Action Plan that was drafted in response to our Mine Ban Treaty obligations but that now serves as our national plan for all disability obligations. This year, it is planned that a monitoring tool for key disability actions will be finalized and implemented.

Our recent developments relevant to the implementation of the Cartagena Action Plan are as follows:

For example, in March this year, Afghanistan was host to the 5th South Asian Community Based Rehabilitation Network Conference, which focused specifically on women and children with disabilities. Over 350 delegates from countries as diverse as Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Maldives and Iran and the UK participated in this conference to share opinions and experiences that would empower women and children with disabilities. This involved a number of Government ministries, UN agencies and NGOs that are stakeholders in disability issues and led to some positive tangible outcomes. For example, Afghanistan has committed to a pilot and field test of the Eastern Mediterranean Region Community Based Rehabilitation Strategy which has been developed by the World Health Organisation.

More generally, our President decreed the establishment of an inter-ministerial taskforce for people with disabilities, which should improve coordination between the different ministries and provide better support to disability issues.

We also expanded our regional coordination of disability activities through the establishment of two Regional Disability Stakeholders Coordination Groups in both the Northern and Eastern regions of the country. These Groups as well as the already established group in Kabul meet on a monthly basis to monitor the implementation of Afghanistan National Disability Action Plan. Regional groups are planned for all of our regional centers and are being rolled out over the course of this year.

Speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the Ministry of Public Health, disability and rehabilitation is a top priority and the Disability and Physical Rehabilitation Department has been officially integrated into the structure of the Ministry. This department has aided the Ministry in developing a five-year strategic document for mainstreaming disability into the public health system of the country.

On a practical level, disability and physiotherapy services are included in to the revised Basic Package of Health Services, integrating physiotherapy into 56 District Hospitals. This will mean that in all of these hospitals at least one male and one female physiotherapist available. However to ensure this happening, expanded training of professional physiotherapists is required as currently only around 20 new physiotherapists can be trained each year.

Also in the last year, 400 health staff was trained in disability awareness and physical rehabilitation in order to support early identification and promote better access to services to people with disabilities.

In order to ensure children with disabilities enjoy educational opportunities, Inclusive Education activities began last year through a Ministry of Education pilot project that facilitated a range of training sessions for school teachers, principals, Government staff and also the children with disabilities themselves with their parents. This has led to an increase in the understanding of the rights of children with disabilities and an appreciation for their need for education. In January this year, the Government accepted the UNESCO Convention against discrimination in education, further supporting equality in our education system.

Within my own Ministry, we have worked hard on developing a vision and mission along with an advocacy campaign to support our activities aimed at ensuring economic and social inclusion for mine survivors and other persons with disabilities. This has already begun, with media outreach, training and awareness raising activities aimed at gaining a better understanding of and advocacy for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the acceptance of our own new National Disability Law.

Despite the many challenges we face – the large number of landmine survivors, the developing state of our public health infrastructure, ongoing conflicts and cultural issues particularly in terms of understanding gender – we are determined to continue to work hard to achieve our obligations and will strive to improve this lives of *all* Afghan mine survivors and other people with disabilities. We hope that you will support us in this.

Thank you.