



UNMAS



FEBRUARY 2015

UNMAS NEWS

DESPITE DECREASING SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN, MINE ACTION CONTINUES

Amidst political uncertainty and intensifying armed conflict as international military forces withdraw from nearly 15 years of combat operations, the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) continues its efforts to rid the country of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW).

This October, upon completion of a village-by-village survey, two more districts in Baghlan province were declared mine-free. More than 70 per cent of mine and ERW threats in Baghlan – one of the most contaminated provinces – have now been removed, opening land for the development of housing, agriculture, health clinics, schools, commerce, roads and other critical infrastructure. At a hando-



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more than mines



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ver ceremony marking the occasion, Baghlan Province Head of Sector Services Abdul Qadir Khurami declared, “we are very thankful to the Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan (MACCA), UNMAS and the international donor community who have supported the MAPA.” Mr. Khurami also praised the heroism and sacrifice of thousands of Afghan deminers working throughout the country.

Key to MAPA’s success is the support it enjoys from the Afghan people who understand the socio-economic benefit of mine action to their communities. Mine-affected populations offer deminers access to land and accommodation and engage in liaison activities to ensure clearance work is in line with the priorities of the local community.

In some instances, locals in mine-affected areas have even courageously defended the lives and resources of MAPA operators. On 27 September in Ghoriza village (Paktia Province), armed insurgents abducted seven MAPA staff, and seized vehicles and equipment from an UNMAS implementing partner. Recognising the value of the project to their lives and livelihoods, the villagers protested and negotiated to secure the safe release of the staff and return of the stolen vehicles and equipment.

Continued donor support is vital to MAPA’s ability to declare Afghanistan mine-free by 2023 under the Ottawa Treaty. Achieving this goal would be a truly historic success story for Afghanistan and the world. If the required funding is not secured, as was the case in 2014, Afghanistan will not fulfill its international obligations and communities will continue to suffer from the presence of mines and ERW.



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“As long as landmines remain in my country, Afghans will continue to experience the devastating consequences of 30 years of conflict and live in fear of violence and insecurity. This is why Mine Action is a priority for the Afghan Government and why we are striving to become mine-free by 2023,” stated Ambassador Zahir Tanin, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations.

UNMAS thanks the following donors for their current support to Afghanistan through the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action: Australia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland.