



Issue # 3
2012

AFGHANISTAN

and the United Nations

UNAMA Mandated to Support Afghan-led Elections

Security Council calls UN an “active” partner to authorities, institutions and civil society

With the Afghan Presidential elections scheduled for 2014, there has been much discussion and debate in the press in Afghanistan about various proposals including those by President Hamid Karzai to move the polls either one year earlier, in 2013, or one year later in 2015. The concern has been that if the polls are at the same time as the planned pull out of international troops this may cause logistical problems.

The main political opposition, the National Front of Afghanistan and the National Coalition of Afghanistan in a joint statement on 30 April 2012 demanded amendment in Electoral law and the Law on Organization and Authority of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), Computerization of electoral process and preparation of voters list throughout the country and organizing the electoral process in partnership with the international community, particularly the United Nations.

The Special Representative of Secretary-General, Ján Kubiš, has met with the Independent Election Commission (IEC), top government officials, parliamentarians and religious leaders in recent weeks to discuss a “comprehensive and inclusive approach” as mandated by the Afghan Constitution. Meanwhile, the UN’s role in this process is already clarified by the UN Security Council which unanimously renewed UNAMA’s mandate for another year.

“At the request of the Afghan authorities, UNAMA will support the organisation of future elections and strengthen, in support of government efforts, the sustainability, integrity and inclusiveness of the electoral process,” Mr. Kubiš said, noting in particular the importance of women’s participation.

“I plan on being an active partner of the government, the institutions and the civil society of Afghanistan in working to strengthen the integrity of future polls,” he added.

In addition to the Special Representative and the UNAMA political team, the UN also provides technical assistance through the United Nations Development Programme’s



Regional team meetings help United Nations coordinate their work. UNAMA Photo

ELECT II capacity building project.

These points are in the new mandate, which gives Mr. Kubiš continued responsibility to play a pro-active role in promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan by leading the civilian efforts of the international community, regional cooperation and the work of all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes.

The Security Council wrote that the work of the UN must be guided by the principle of reinforcing Afghan sovereignty, leadership and ownership.

The new mandate also stresses the importance of a comprehensive, inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned political process to support reconciliation for all who are prepared to reconcile, while continuing to assess – including in collaboration with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) – its human rights and gender implications.

The United Nations encourages dialogue

with those who “renounce violence, have no links to international terrorist organizations”, including Al-Qaida, “respect the constitution,” including its human rights provisions, notably the rights of women, “and are willing to join in building a peaceful Afghanistan”.

In the mandate renewal, the Security Council put greater emphasis than ever before on the United Nations’ work to protect civilians and to monitor abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law in Afghanistan, particularly against women and children.

The Security Council also noted continued restrictions on freedom of media and attacks against journalists in the country. They reaffirmed the need to ensure women’s full, equal and effective participation in any peace processes and urged faster implementation of the of the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA), and the law for Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW), including services to victims.

Afghanistan To Be Mine-Impact Free in 10 Years

Despite progress, many parts of country still strewn with danger

After decades of sustained clearance efforts, Afghanistan is within 10 years of becoming free from the impact of mines. Working closely with the Afghan Government, the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan (MAPA) has developed an action plan to remove all known hazards within a decade.

The plan is part of the Government’s request to the Secretariat of the Ottawa Convention

to extend until 2023 Afghanistan’s deadline to clear its territory of all anti-personnel mines.

The Ottawa Convention is known as the “Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction”. As of January 2012, 159 states had acceded to the Convention, with Afghanistan becoming a State Party in 2003. Under Article 5 of the Conven-

tion, countries are obligated to remove all anti personnel mines from mined areas within ten years of their becoming a State Party.

“Had the war not continued, and had we had sufficient funding, we would have resolved this problem by now,” said Mohammad Sediq Rashid, Chief of Operations for the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA), *Continued on page 2*

Inside Stories

Reducing casualties:
MAPA makes progress

See page 2



Kabul I Love You:
UNAMA releases film

See page 3



Preserving nature:
New national effort launched

See page 4



Movie Captures Transformed City

A collection of young Afghan filmmakers take a look at modern Kabul

A young couple from different backgrounds question the marriages their parents have arranged. A taxi driver who has been shuttling through Kabul since the time of the King reflects on changes in the capital and relies on his wits to survive. A young woman flees a forced marriage by hiding in a mosque but is ultimately arrested by police who have been tipped off by one of the woman's neighbors.

All these scenarios are short films that make up "Kabul, I Love You", a feature film that will debut in the capital city in mid-May. Conceived and financed by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the project offers a mosaic of stories, set in a variety of neighborhoods, offering a whirlwind tour of contemporary Afghan life in the capital.

"Filmmakers were selected to tell a story that illustrates the universality of love, and their love for the city of Kabul city, for its people, and for their country within a human rights context. This was an opportunity to rebuild a visual memory of Kabul," said Shores Kalantari, the former head of UNAMA's multimedia unit and the person who first conceived the idea for the movie.

When the project was advertised UNAMA received about 200 proposals. Choosing scripts took several months. The selection criteria included originality of the script, quality of previous work and technical competence. Script proposals also needed to adhere to the UN's core values of respect for human rights and gender equality.

Each selected film was given a budget of about \$8,000 dollars, and the filmmakers were asked to submit a ten minute short movie that would portray the joys and anxieties of life in Kabul.

In the end, eleven scripts were selected, yet only ten movies were completed. Upon receiving his grant money one young director chose instead to use the cash to fly to



Young filmmaker directing short film. Photo by Fardin Waezi

Switzerland where he sought asylum. Of the ten shorts produced nine written by men and one by a woman. There were nine male directors and one woman. The ages

"The producers and filmmakers had complete freedom in making their films. The only monitoring that took place was to ensure better quality of the films," said Malik

The project offers a mosaic of stories, set in a variety of neighborhoods, offering a whirlwind tour of contemporary Afghan life in the capital

of those directors and scriptwriters ranged between 18 and 60, though most were in their 20's and 30's.

Filmmakers completed their movies over a four month period and submitted final cuts to UNAMA at the end of March, 2012.

Shafiee, Line Producer for the project.

Shooting a film in Kabul posed unique challenges. Yasmeen Yarmal, the lone female director shot part of her movie at Kabul airport. Even after obtaining permission from authorities filming was nonetheless halted several dozen times by concerned security staff. Later, filming a scene at a hotel, she was confronted by residents who objected to a woman working as a filmmaker. It took another director, Farhad Reza-e, three weeks to find a mosque where he would be allowed to film inside.

"This was my first time shooting a movie in Afghanistan and it was a real learning experience. I was very surprised by how curious and involved onlookers became when I started shooting," said Mr. Reza-e.

"Kabul, I Love You" will be premiere on 17 May 2012 at the French Institute in Kabul. Afterwards, plans exist to reach a larger audience by broadcasting the movie on Afghan national television and by touring remote parts of the country with a mobile cinema. The movie may also be entered into international movie festivals.

"Along with other development projects there is a need for cultural development, for opportunities for young Afghans to help shape the country's new cultural identity," said Ariadna Alvarado, a producer with the multimedia section of UNAMA. "The arts have a big role to play in promoting modern Afghan values."



Filmmakers came from different background. Photo by Fardin Waezi



Over the past 23 years, 1914 communities have been cleared of mines. Photo by Eric Kanalstien

Continued from first page

which coordinates MAPA implementation.

And as economic enterprise develops across Afghanistan, MAPA is finding previously unknown minefields laid during past conflicts, which has also pushed back the original timeline for clearance.

Mr. Rashid noted that the extension request and action plan include the clearance of anti-tank mines and other explosive remnants of war. “These have a great impact on the population. So, from a humanitarian perspective, Afghanistan cannot focus solely on the eradication of anti-personnel mines.”

The magnitude of the mine problem in Afghanistan, coupled with ongoing conflict, under-funding and poor records of mined areas, have meant that the initial deadline of 2013 was untenable. In March 2012, the Afghan Government submitted the request for a ten-year extension, which will be assessed by 10 members of Secretariat by the end of November 2012.

“It is very important for Afghanistan to stay committed to the Convention and its targets,” said Mr. Rashid. “This could also have implications for international funding for mine action and other assistance from State Parties.”

In the last two decades of operations, MAPA – the collective term for all agencies involved in demining efforts in Afghanistan – has made tremendous progress, clearing vast swaths of lands around the country. However, much remains to be done.

Over a million Afghans still live within 500 meters of landmine contaminated areas, and nearly 6,000 mine-contaminated sites exist in 33 out of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. Only DaiKundi province is mine-free.

Located in rangelands as well as adjacent to important pieces of infrastructure, the remaining mine-affected areas are a significant drag on development. According to MACCA, 17 provinces each contain over 100 contaminated sites, located near irrigation systems, power supply lines and the ring road. Large scale development projects such as the planned railway between Kabul and Mazar and hydroelectric dam projects in Kunar, Laghman and Takhar provinces are often constrained by the presence of minefields. Presently there are 43 development projects which will require some

mine action intervention.

“Mine action interventions are undertaken based on a system of prioritization. Top priority is given to roads, residential and business areas, irrigation systems and agricultural lands,” said Mr. Rashid. “Currently 80 percent of the mine-contaminated sites are in the agricultural and rangelands.”

“Had the war not continued, and had we had sufficient funding, we would have resolved this problem by now,” said Mohammad Sediq

For the year 1391 (2012-1013), 38 projects have been planned by the MAPA. The demining teams will work in 493 villages in 107 districts throughout 24 provinces. As a result of these efforts, 30 districts will be cleared of mines and other explosive devices.

Large scale mine clearance operations began in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989. Over the past 23 years, 1,914 communities have been cleared of mines. Demining teams have cleared or canceled 19,088 sites over 1,939 kilometers and defused over one million anti personnel mines. (The term ‘canceling’ a minefield refers to a process whereby a suspected hazardous area is verified to be free of mines.) This also in-

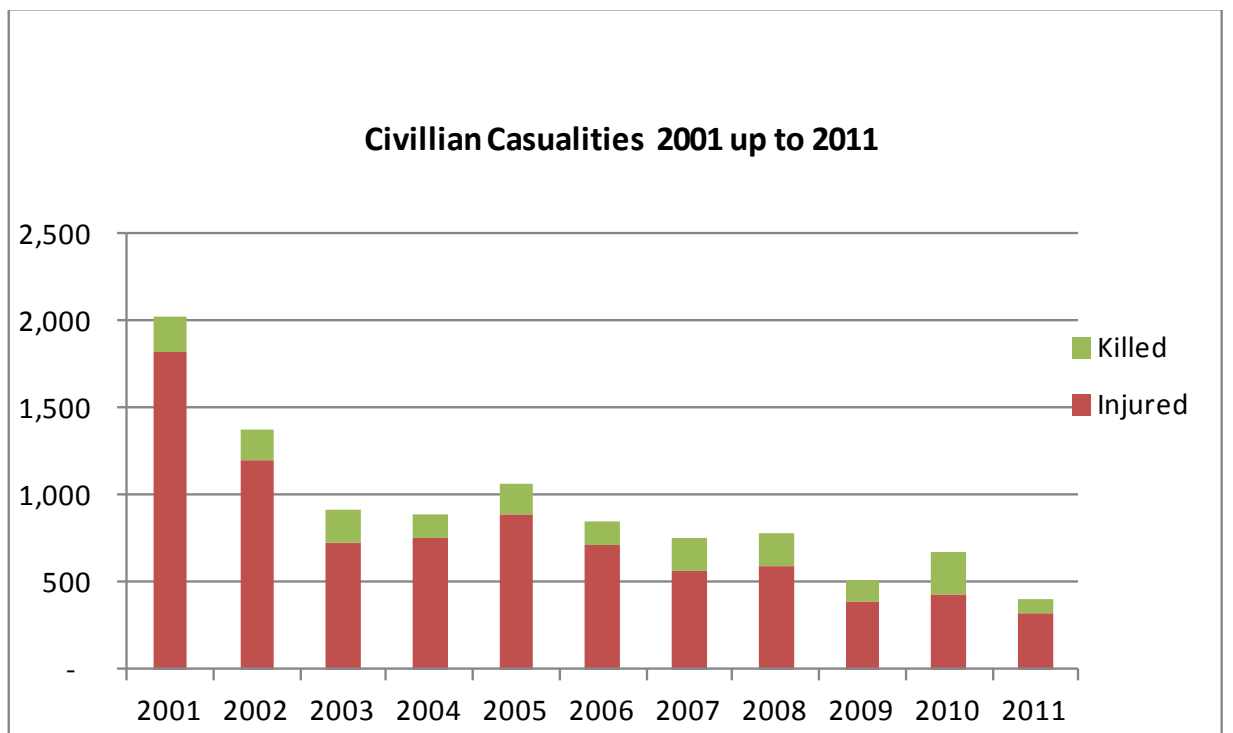
cludes the destruction of stockpiles belonging to the Afghan Ministry of Defense, which was a requirement of the Ottawa Convention. To date, around 35,000 anti-tank mines and 14.8 million other explosives have been destroyed.

An essential component of the mine clearance programme is risk awareness training for residents living in areas blighted by mines and un-

exploded ordnance. In the past decade, nearly 12.5 million Afghans have received mine risk education.

MACCA’s Chief of Operations said that MAPA’s efforts have largely eliminated mines from Afghanistan’s major cities. The clearance work also enabled the completion of several power lines, including a supply line from Uzbekistan to Kabul. Casualty rates have plummeted.

“The demining work has significantly contributed to reducing the casualty rates from mines from 2,027 in 2001 to 391 in 2011. That is having a direct impact on the socio-economic uplift of the Afghan people and economy,” said Mr. Rashid.



Mine related casualties have declined since 2001. Chart provided by MACCA

Biodiversity Conservation Program Launched

UN works with government and communities to preserve nature



Working with communities to preserve the nature. Photo by Fardin Waezi

Last year a group of conservationists set up a camera in a hard-to-reach valley of the Central Highlands region. Their camera was connected to sensors which could detect movement and would take photos when there was activity in the area. After that the group left the area for several months. What these conservationists were hoping to photograph were some of Afghanistan's rare animal species which live in these mountains in Bamyan province.

Their patience was rewarded. In March, when the conservationists from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), working with the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA), returned to collect the camera, they were discovered a trove of images of animals operating in their natural habitat. Most spectacular of all was an image of a Persian Leopard, an animal feared to be extinct because there had been few reported sightings in nearly 50 years.

That photography project is just a small part of a much more grand conservation plan by the government of Afghanistan. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan includes

creating a national conservation areas system, creating a herbarium and seed bank for all common and rarer plant species, preserving forests, rivers and mountain areas, boosting awareness about nature throughout Afghan society and creating a conservation science degree program at the University of Kabul. Financing restoration projects and sharing benefits from nature is also a vital component of the overall plan.

While the Afghan Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the Environmental Protection Agency are taking the lead on these projects, they are being supported with technical assistance and funding by international technical assistance projects, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Communities that live within areas that are marked as conservation areas are also being consulted so that plans to preserve nature don't inhibit economic growth.

"This is a government led approach but with

communities as the main custodians," said Andrew Scanlon, the Country Programme Manager for UNEP in Afghanistan. UNEP's conservation programme started under EU funding in 2005. "In creating these programs we are trying to build on traditional systems of conservation that are already in place,

So far, five conservation areas are in active management, but plans exist to create another 25 between now and 2020

and empower local people to look at their environment as a resource and an asset."

Creating national parks in Afghanistan isn't

a new idea. A national system was first proposed in the 1970's under King Zahir Shah. At that time the country had 17 nature preserves but they were mainly intended as hunting reserves. Plans faltered after 1979 when Russian invaded. What's different now is the scale of the project, which could see conservation areas in each of Afghanistan's provinces, as well as the emphasis on community development, education and conservation.

So far, 5 conservation areas are in active management, but plans exist to create another 25 between now and 2020. The largest of these preserves is Band-I Amir a 670 square kilometre area in the Central Highlands. Last year about 100,000 Afghans visited the park. Shah Foladi, in the Koh-e Baba Mountains is a community conservation area and important source of five of Afghanistan's main rivers. The most visited preserve is a wetland area, Kol-e Hashmat Khan, north of Kabul, which drew about 500,000 visitors last year. Two high mountain nature preserves are being prepared along the Wakhan Corridor in the High Pamir areas of Badakshan.

The project to preserve plants hopes to create a seed bank of about 3,000 plant species that can only be found in Afghanistan. This effort mirrors a previous program launched in the 1950s at the University of Kabul.

The Environment Science Programme at Kabul University was approved by Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education in 2010 as a four year course of study. About 40 students a year are be enrolled in studies that emphasising natural resource management, urban environmental issues, and technical and scientific skills for environment management, including wildlife conservation and nature management. A second course in environment conservation studies in the faculty of agriculture will be started in 2012. As these students graduate and start work in the coming years, a new Afghan wave of environmental protection and sustainable development champions is coming on line.



Proposed protected nature areas in Afghanistan. Map provided by UNEP