

## **Mine action reaches remote Afghan villages**

By Homayon Khoram

21 October 2008 – In the north eastern province of Takhar in Afghanistan 200 families live in a remote village where 20 people have lost their lives in mine related incidents over the years.

The village of Shaikhandara Bala has just one primary school operating under a tree and no clinics or any other services.

“It is nine years that we are virtually surrounded by landmines laid around our village during the 1996-2001 fighting between the Taliban and the northern alliance (anti-Taliban coalition),” said a village elder Najeebullah, who goes by one name.

“Twenty villagers have died and a dozen have been maimed. Landmines have killed around 500 cattle and 1000 acres of our agricultural land is not used because of landmines,” added Najeebullah.

“I was grazing my cattle when I stepped on a landmine and lost my left leg,” said another villager Mohmmad Ali.

There are a dozen young and older villagers who are maimed, most of them have lost a leg and one villager lost his right eye.

The Mine Detection Centre (MDC), an Afghan non-governmental organization, has come to the rescue of the villagers of Shaikhandara Bala.

Two areas cleared of land mines have been handed over to the villagers since de-mining started in the village in June this year. This includes one area (11,563 square metres) handed over to village elders in a ceremony today. Five areas remain contaminated and MDC is working to clear them.

This is great news for the villagers. Now their children walk with no fear in that area, poor farmers whose only livelihood is agriculture and livestock now can cultivate their land.

“We are extremely thankful to our de-mining brothers who are helping us get rid of mines,” said a village elder at the hand over ceremony.

Since the beginning of the operation in the village 64 anti-personnel mines have been discovered and destroyed.

MDC has cleared one million square metres of landmines in the north eastern region since January 2008. 19 anti-tank mines, 438 anti-personnel mines, 48 UXOs (unexploded ordinance) have been discovered and destroyed.

There are 331 communities in the four provinces of the north eastern region that are affected by landmines. 165 people have been killed and more than 1100 people have been injured in mine accidents in the four provinces of Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar and Badakhshan.

According to the Ottawa Convention banning mines Afghanistan should be free of landmines by 2013. “If there are no problems with the funding we will be able to meet the Ottawa convention’s benchmark and make Afghanistan a mine-free country,” said Dr. Haider Reza the head of the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA).

**United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan [www.unama-afg.org](http://www.unama-afg.org)**