

UNMAS AFGHANISTAN AND DMAC STRONGLY CONDEMN BRUTAL MURDER OF AN AFGHAN DEMINER IN NANGARHAR

KABUL, 12 September 2017 – The Afghanistan Directorate for Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Afghanistan condemn in the strongest terms the killing of an Afghan deminer by Anti Government Elements, reportedly affiliated to *Daesh*/Islamic State Khorasan province, in Afghanistan's eastern province of Nangarhar.

On the evening of 9 September, in Aghro village, Chaparhar district, a group of Anti-Government Elements intentionally slit the throat of the de-miner, who worked for AREA, an Afghan non-governmental humanitarian demining organisation. The attackers also shot dead two other civilian men. While the motive for the attack is unclear, sources reported that attackers killed the humanitarian de-miner after asking his identity, despite his explanation that he worked as a humanitarian involved in removing mines.

“I am deeply saddened by this cruel attack” said Ms. Yngvil Foss, the UNMAS Country Programme Manager. “Deminers are humanitarians, who risk life and limb daily so that others can move safely about the country. Their work should be respected by all, and their safety should be guaranteed”, Foss added.

Afghan deminers continue to pay a heavy price for their high risk work. In 2016, The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 20 separate incidents of attacks and threats against humanitarian deminers, resulting in 19 civilian casualties (nine deaths and 10 injured).

DMAC and UNMAS Afghanistan reiterates that acts of violence and other attacks against deminers not only affect the guarantees afforded to all human beings but also undermine the fundamental role that deminers play in society and contribute to the vulnerability of all those whose safety they work to protect.

As instances of civilian casualties from unexploded remnants of war continue to increase, with children comprising the overwhelming majority of victims, DMAC and UNMAS urge parties to the conflict – particularly Anti-Government Elements – to refrain from targeting humanitarian deminers and to provide them safe access to affected areas.

DMAC and UNMAS Afghanistan emphasise that humanitarians are de-miners are civilians and therefore protected from attack by international humanitarian law. The intentional killing of civilians is a war crime.

“Attacks on humanitarian deminers have serious consequences and adversely affect civilians and local communities who depend on the work of deminers to make their communities safe. Civilian Casualties as a result of landmines, Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and Pressure Plate Improvised Explosive Ordnance (PPIED) are already on the rise and on average 152 civilians lose their lives and limbs every month” said Mr. Mohammad Shafiq Yosufi, Director of the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC).

Afghanistan remains one of the most severely mine-affected countries in the world. It also has the largest and most established demining programmes, with more than 7,000 people working for both national and international demining organizations. Those working on projects to clear mines often find themselves targeting by Anti Government Elements in the country. Afghan deminers continue to face high risks of violence.

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