

**Comments on Afghanistan's Article 4 Extension Request
Delivered by NPA on behalf of Mine Action Review
Second Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (Part 2)
20-21 September 2021**

Thank you, Mr President.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Mine Action Review project.

Although disappointing that Afghanistan will not complete clearance of cluster munition remnants by its original Article 4 deadline of 1 March 2022, we welcome the submission of the well-drafted, concrete extension request, ensuring Afghanistan remains in compliance with the Convention.

Afghanistan has requested a four-year extension to 1 March 2026, to enable it to address both the existing cluster munition clearance tasks, the funding for some of which had been unexpectedly delayed, and the eleven previously unknown hazardous areas discovered in 2021.

According to Afghanistan, when its current deadline expires in March 2022, 16 hazardous areas will remain, totaling nearly 10km². These have been surveyed and identified for clearance. In addition, there is a further 3km² of possible cluster munition remnant contamination in Zurmat district of Paktya province, which was not accessible at the time of submission of the request, due to the presence of armed groups.

Afghanistan needs to survey the suspected hazardous area in Zurmat district as soon as security conditions allow, to confirm or deny the presence of submunitions. The Directorate of Mine Action Coordination (DMAC) has said it does not expect to find any further areas of currently unknown cluster munition contamination, but acknowledges that non-technical survey teams continue to explore and conduct village-by-village survey, and as such any further contamination will be promptly exposed and recorded. We encourage Afghanistan to provide States Parties updates on any such additional contamination discovered, through its Article 7 reporting and Article 4 updates.

Afghanistan should also ensure that it has sustainable national capacity to address residual cluster munition remnant contamination identified after fulfilment of its Article 4 clearance obligations.

While the length of the extension was an unexpected surprise, it is linked to additional funding only being made available from end of 2022 and clearance operations in Paktya province only being possible for a six-month period, due to adverse weather conditions in the winter.

Lastly, Mine Action Review hopes that DMAC will be able to maintain its strong commitment towards mainstreaming gender and diversity in mine action under the new government.

Thank you.