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## Kabul City Clearance Project

Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil

*Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan*

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# Kabul City Clearance Project

After decades of conflict in Afghanistan, the Kabul City Clearance Project is addressing the dangers of mine and unexploded ordnance that pose a threat to the safety and livelihood of Kabul's expanding urban population. KCCP is an 18-month collaborative project that utilizes the resources of Afghan Technical Consultants, a local clearance nongovernmental organization, to implement a mine-clearance plan in 36 impacted communities.

by Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil [ Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan ]



Figure 1. Map showing the extent of landmine contamination in Kabul City, Afghanistan.  
Map courtesy of MACCA.

Decades of conflict have left Kabul City, Afghanistan ravaged by war and contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance. Despite the great achievements of mine-clearance operations to date, 92 confirmed hazardous areas (which were recorded in a polygon survey) remain within Kabul's city limits, rendering only approximately six square kilometers (2.32 square miles) available for pasturing, farming and housing. More safe land is urgently needed by a rapidly growing urban population. Thousands of people have lost their lives or become disabled in mine and unexploded-ordnance

accidents in the city, and currently approximately two people every month are fatally or seriously injured.

The KCCP is working to clear Kabul City of mines based on a two-phase plan. Phase 1, which is underway, consists of 44 of the confirmed hazardous areas; Phase 2 consists of 48 additional CHAs and will be implemented in early 2012. If the KCCP continues clearance at the current rate of progression, meeting or exceeding their target timeline, and they receive adequate funding for the second phase, they could completely remove all known hazards in Kabul City within an operating period of 18 months.

## Kabul City's History of Contamination

Kabul City has experienced prolonged and intense conflict resulting from:<sup>1</sup>

- The Russian invasion and its subsequent regime from 1978 to 1990
- *Mujahedin* conflicts between 1991 and 1994
- Northern Alliance and Taliban fighting from 1995 to September 2001
- Aerial campaign by Coalition and NATO Forces commencing October 2001

## Historical Achievement of Mine Action

Mine and UXO survey and clearance, which was commenced in 1994 by several organizations including ATC, Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghanistan Rehabilitation, The HALO Trust, Mine Clearance Planning Agency and Mine Detection Dog Center in Kabul City. After some years, two more national and international mine-clearance organizations—Demining Agency for Afghanistan and Danish Demining Group—became involved in this process. The mentioned organizations are supported by the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) and other bilateral donors. Since then, significant



Figure 2. Map showing cleared minefields and suspected hazardous areas in Kabul City, Afghanistan.  
Map courtesy of MACCA.

progress has been made toward ridding the city of these hazards, including the following:

- Almost 60,000 anti-personnel mines, 2,000 anti-tank mines and more than one million items of UXO were located and destroyed.<sup>2</sup>
- More than 25 sq. km. (9.65 sq. miles) of minefields were cleared and more than 168 sq. km. (64.87 sq. miles) of battlefields were cleared.<sup>2</sup>

The map in Figure 2 shows where clearance has taken place in Kabul City.

Despite these successes, more than 23 years of conflict have resulted in Kabul becoming one of the world's most heavily mined capital cities, and the civilian community continues to pay an unacceptably high price. Since 1979, mines and UXO have killed or injured 2,152 people, more than 30 percent of whom were between the ages of seven and 14. On average, this equates to 72 people and impacting 72 families per year for three decades devastated by indiscriminate death or injury.<sup>2</sup> The chart in Figure 3 shows how, as a result of clearance achievements to date, the accident rate has significantly reduced since 2001.

Kabul City has experienced massive population growth since 2002, with a yearly increase of about 400,000 people, or 55,000 households, which urgently require access to land and services. Mines and UXO pose the threat of death and injury, and also block access to vitally needed resources for this rapidly growing city. These hazards directly impact approximately 584,703 men, women and children.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of mines and UXO significantly affects resettlement and development within the city limits, and contributes to restricted economic growth and opportunity for the city's

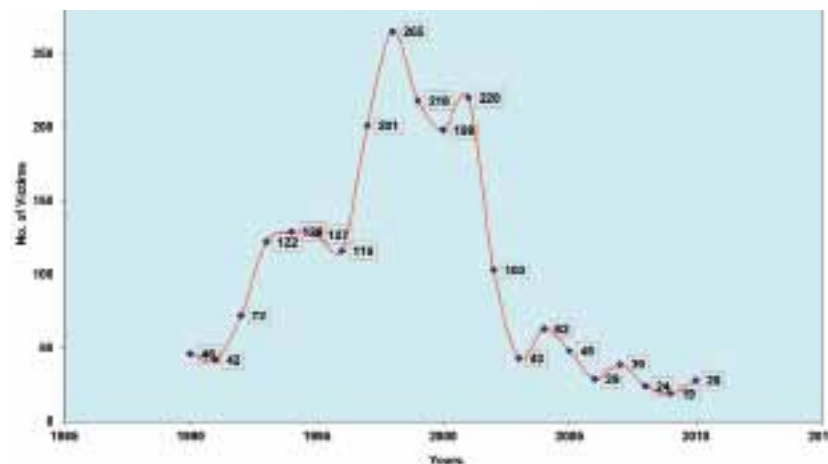


Figure 3. Graph illustrating the declining rate of civilian victims in Kabul City, Afghanistan since 2001.  
Graph courtesy of MACCA.

most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. Though many minefields were cleared in the central and high-profile areas of the city, until funding is available, KCCP will wait to clear minefields in peripheral communities, such as mountainous areas and other locations that appear deserted or unused. The mines in these areas, however, threaten the rising urban-poor population. Communities forced to live on the edges of established society put themselves at increased risk of mine/UXO accidents out of necessity as they search for fuel (e.g., grasses, wood), medicinal plants, food (e.g., mountain rhubarb) and graze their animals in areas suspected to be unsafe.

#### Operational Methodology

Kabul City's remaining hazards are located in ward numbers 3, 5-8, 14-16 and 19-22. The operational methodology is based on an integrated approach to demining using manual-demining teams supported by mine-detection dog teams and mechanical assets, plus a roving explosive-ordnance-disposal capacity. The KCCP was designed for completion in 18 months, with operations suspended between December and March (winter season). Through analysis of the minefields in each



Deminers during the selection process.  
Photo courtesy of ATC.

cluster (size, location, contamination type, etc.), the assets required to most efficiently remove mine and UXO contamination were determined. Complete clearance of all known hazards in Kabul City will be achieved through the deployment of the following:

- Nineteen manual demining teams
- Three mine-detection dog teams
- One mechanical demining unit
- One EOD team

The KCCP will clear known recorded hazards in 12 out of 22 contaminated districts of Kabul City within wards 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21 and 22 (see Figure 1). The direct beneficiaries of this project are the members from 36 mine- and UXO-affected communities. The cleared land will be used for a variety of purposes, including residential housing, livestock grazing, leisure activities and implementation of rehabilitation and development projects.

#### Current Situation

The project area has been divided into two phases in which the high-priority areas will be cleared during Phase 1 and the medium- and low-priority areas will be addressed during Phase 2.

The project's first phase is funded through a contribution to the Voluntary Trust Fund made by the European Union. Clearance started 6 January 2011 and should be completed 5 January 2012. During the one-year period (two months training and 10 working months) of Phase 1, 19 community-based demining teams and one EOD team are working to clear the high-priority areas.

ATC recruited deminers from the affected communities through extensive community-liaison activities, explaining the project objectives and expected outcomes. Community elders nominated eligible candidates who then completed

demining training courses conducted by Afghan Technical Consultants. The trained deminers are now busy clearing their village areas from mine and UXO hazards.

These are the projected outcomes for this clearance project:

- ATC will clear all 20 CHAs in the project area classified as first-priority tasks.
- Twenty-four CHAs classified as second-priority minefields will be cleared and then removed from the MACCA hazard list.
- Mine clearance of known hazards in Kabul City's Dih Sabz and Bagrami districts will be completed.
- A total area of 2,340,769 square meters (578 acres) will be cleared during the project and will be handed over to villagers for agricultural and construction purposes.
- A total of 266 people from the affected communities have been provided with job opportunities as deminers, section leaders, guards, drivers, etc.
- Following the project's completion, 10,609 families from 15 villages in Kabul City will directly benefit from the mine-clearance activities, and the region's community as a whole will indirectly benefit.



Deminers in a training class.  
Photo courtesy of ATC.

- Following clearance, previously affected communities will be able to resume essential socioeconomic activities in an environment free from the threat of mines and UXO.
- By conducting voluntary mine-risk education sessions in the target communities, the number of mine/UXO victims will decrease in the villages where the project is implemented.
- Communities have been mobilized to work on their ability to create a friendly environment for rehabilitation, mitigation and development initiatives, with a



Deminer working in a minefield during KCCP operations.  
Photo courtesy of ATC.

special focus on livelihood support such as food security and the alleviation of poverty.

- The KCCP will contribute toward Afghanistan's States Parties' obligation to the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and their Destruction* (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC); it is expected that by March 2013 all known mined areas will be cleared from Afghanistan.

During the project implementation, ATC is building demining skills of the recruited community members by conducting on-the-job as well as off-the-job trainings. The off-the-job trainings include review of demining techniques, lessons learned, mine-risk education and first aid at their base camps after leaving demining sites. During the first 12 months, the selected deminers and section leaders underwent capacity-development training, and if the project continues through a second year, section leaders will be trained to take over team-leader positions.

### Conclusion

Following completion of the KCCP, all known recorded hazards will be removed from the city (except some residual threat from exposure of any subsurface UXO that appears during construction work, movement of ERW from other areas or identification of new hazardous areas), and civilian accident rates are expected to substantially decline. Also, a number of people trained as deminers during the implementation of this project will be given opportunities to be hired as deminers on other projects or to advance to higher positions such as section leaders or team leaders. As soon as funds are provided for Phase 2 of this project, and Phase 2 is completed, 22 wards in Kabul will be announced free from hazards of known minefields. The cleared land will be used for housing, agriculture, livestock pasturing, leisure activities, development projects and industrial revitalization, and the people who live close to the cleared areas will be able to live safely. ◊

See endnotes page 83



Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil was born in Kabul and graduated from Habibia High School before immigrating to Pakistan where he studied under the International Rescue Committee Construction Engineering Program. In August 1995, he joined Afghan Technical Consultants and worked as Assistant Operations Officer, Assistant Site Officer, Supervisor, and Operations Officer until February 2003. He then joined MACCA as Operations Assistant and he was promoted in 2006 to Area Manager. He is also a graduate of James Madison University's 2010 ERW/Senior Managers Course.

Mohammad Akbar Oriakhil  
Area Manager  
Mine Action Coordination Centre of  
Afghanistan (MACCA) for Central Area  
Mobile: +93 (0) 705 966 529 /  
+ 93 (0) 700 223 352  
Email: akbar.oriakhil@macca.org.af  
Skype: makbaroriakhil  
Website: <http://macca.org.af>