

# Press release: UK helps rid war-torn Afghanistan of lethal landmines making thousands safer

Among Herat City's historic sites cleared of landmines are the 15th century minarets of the Husain Baiqara Madrasa

UK aid-backed The HALO Trust has, after a mammoth 10-year clear-up operation, handed back Afghanistan's most deadly province for landmines to its governor, after making land safe once again for homes, schools and farmland.

The NGO's Afghan staff have cleared 39 million square metres of mine fields and 45 million square metres of battlefield in Herat with UK aid support.

In total, more than 600 minefields have been cleared in the province in the west of the country.

Minelaying during previous conflicts had left Herat with the highest landmine accident rate in the country. Before mine clearance began there, on average 125 people each year were maimed or killed by landmines each year in the province.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Landmines are an abhorrent and indiscriminate killer that causes suffering across the world. It is often children who are the most affected by landmines, playing in dangerous areas where one wrong step can maim them forever or take their life.

Clearing land of mines gives people a chance to rebuild their lives through new schools, farming the land and starting businesses that allow them to support their families.

The HALO Trust was founded 30 years ago in Afghanistan and has grown to be the world's largest humanitarian mine clearance organisation. The handover of the land to the governor is yet another milestone for them to celebrate and shows how UK aid is supporting one of the most fragile countries in the world to stand on its own two feet.

This is one of the many ways that UK aid is making the world safer, healthier and more prosperous for us all.

James Cowan, The Halo Trust CEO, said:

Among the achievements of this project, one that makes me most proud is the USAID-funded women's dormitory built at Herat University on land cleared by HALO with UK funding. Hundreds of young women now have access to higher education at Afghanistan's second-largest university. This has given hope to an entire province of one of the world's most heavily-mined countries.

We have witnessed the amazing contribution that DFID is making to clearing the country of landmines. DFID's support is saving lives and creating livelihoods.

In Herat City an entire new district, Jebrail, has been built on land cleared of landmines and has become home for 60,000 people – many of them returning refugees.

New schools and colleges have been built on the cleared land as well as several businesses and new railway infrastructure, which will allow for safer travel throughout the region.

Among Herat City's historic sites cleared of landmines are the 15th century minarets of the Husain Baiqara Madrasa.

The removal of landmines has had a major impact on Herat's potential for economic development.

Around 75 per cent of the population of the province is rural and millions of square metres of prime agricultural land were unusable because of the fear of landmines.

With UK funding, HALO has made 40 million square metres of agricultural land safe to farm, and in doing so has immeasurably improved and made more secure the futures of farming families.

- Representatives from The HALO Trust attended a handover ceremony in Herat City with Mr. Haji Kamran, Chairman of the Provincial Council of Herat Province and Mrs. Monesa Hassanzada, Deputy Governor of Herat Province. Two districts in the province, have not yet been cleared because of insecurity where they are located.
- The UK Government committed £100 million over three years to demining in April 2017. This £100m commitment comprises:□
- £12.6 million in the current financial year as an extension to the pre-existing contract of the Global Mine Action Programme, which is delivered by the Halo Trust, MAG and Norwegian People's Aid in Burma, Cambodia, South Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.□
- £20 million for Afghanistan in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.□
- £15.4 million for the Middle East including Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20.□

- The remainder will be for demining programmes in financial years 2018/19 and 2019/20 in Angola, South Sudan, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- Last year Global Mine Action Programme ensured that more than 140,000,000 square meters of land have been released. Mine risk education programmes have reached more than 426,000 people this year, including near 360,000 women and children.
- DFID will be continuing its programming in Asia and Africa including Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Somalia and South Sudan.
- In January this year, DFID invited organisations to bid for work in Angola, South Sudan, Lebanon, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
- In Afghanistan the UK has supported demining activities, through the HALO Trust in Herat (Western Afghanistan), Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan (Northern Afghanistan) since 2008, through two five year phases with a total of £20.5 million. This support to the HALO Trust in Afghanistan will end in March 2018. Through UK aid:
  - 193,650 families have benefited from cleared lands in Herat, Baghlan, Balkh and Samangan
  - 2,900 hectares have been unblocked for development purposes (agriculture, grazing, residential and road access)□
  - 96% of households surveyed reported increased income as a result of mine clearance
  - 43 communities have been cleared of all known mine/ unexploded ordnance hazards
  - 380 direct and 660 indirect jobs have created in all target provinces
  - Over 39,147,860 square metres of accessible minefields have been cleared in target provinces
  - Over 45,609,000 square metres of remaining area of battlefield with unexploded ordnance and ammunition are cleared in target provinces