International conference on landmines opens in Kabul (Afghanistan)

A regional conference of Asia-Pacific countries evaluating the work aimed at the prevention of landmines was held at the Foreign Affair Ministry today.

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The aim is to turn Afghanistan into a country with no land mines within the next 10 years.

A Bakhtar News Agency correspondent reports: The conference is taking place in Kabul at a time when some 460 sq m of land in Afghanistan are said to be covered with various kinds of landmines. Millions of landmines, planted in different parts of Afghanistan, kill, disable or injure a number of our compatriots every year.

The conference mainly focuses on are the prevention of the production and sale of landmines. It also aims to encourage Asian countries that are not yet members of Ottawa treaty to join it.

At the beginning of the conference, the head of the office of the Father of the Nation Mohammad Zaher's read out his [Mohammad Zaher's] message concerning the issue.

The message evaluated reasons behind planting landmines in Afghanistan. It went on to say: The existence of millions of unexploded mines still threatens the lives of millions of Afghans. This enemy of humanity is planted on agricultural lands, communication routes, bridges and water dams.

Deputy Head of State Hedayat Amin Arsala also spoke on the matter.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Reza [phonetic, not listed in the post] stressed the need for the continuation of the international community cooperation on mine-clearance in Afghanistan.

The Canadian ambassador to Afghanistan reiterated his country's cooperation on the acceleration of the mine-clearing process in Afghanistan.

On the first day of the conference, a representative of the international organization against landmines, Prof Sebghatollah Mojaddedi, a representative from the National Defence Ministry, a person speaking on behalf of 16 mine-clearance organizations in Afghanistan and a representative of the disabled addressed the conference.

Twenty-two countries have been invited to participate in the conference, but according to relevant sources, some invited countries could not take part in the first day of the conference.

Some 500 people have lost their lives since beginning of the mine-clearance process in Afghanistan.

Deputy foreign affairs minister, Mohammad Shahab Hakimi, director of the Afghan struggle against landmines [organization], and a representative of the international organization for the research on mines attended a news conference and answered journalists' questions.

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<<< zurück zu: News