Media Update
3 April 2020

United Nations
Secretary-General Message

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION
4 April 2020

Decades ago, millions of landmines were buried in countries across the world. From Cambodia to Mozambique, in Angola and in Afghanistan, thousands of lives were lost, with others altered forever because of one unlucky step. The outcry by civil society in the early 1990s drove the multilateral system to take a stand against the use of anti-personnel mines, leading to the Mine Ban Convention of 1997 and other crucial frameworks. Today, many countries have declared themselves mine free – with others well on the way.

Now, the world is facing a daunting pandemic. The dangers posed by COVID-19 are forcing every country, and every person, to take steps that would have seemed unimaginable mere weeks ago. It is for this reason that this year’s observance of the International Day for Mine Awareness has been scaled back. The football tournaments, due to take place on land cleared of explosive ordnance, have been cancelled; the events aimed at bringing together the mine action community will take place virtually, if at all.

Yet, even in the midst of an unprecedented crisis, we cannot let this Day go unnoticed, nor can we allow the rights of persons with disabilities to go unacknowledged. Mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices threaten some of the most vulnerable people in society: women traveling to markets, farmers herding cattle, humanitarian workers trying to reach those most in need.

Moreover, the achievements of the mine action community show that, in working together, we can reach milestones once seen as impossible – a timely message for our efforts today to suppress transmission of the pandemic.
So let us remember the people living under the shadow of explosive ordnance, from Syria to Mali and elsewhere. As many people around the world work safely from home, they will remain exposed and vulnerable. And, when the world emerges from today’s crisis, they will continue to need our support.

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UNHCR
PRESS RELEASE

UNHCR intensifies its outreach to refugee communities on the coronavirus
Announces Rs.1,000 mobile top-up for 3,000 Outreach Volunteers and community mobilizers

ISLAMABAD, 3 April 2020: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency has intensified its outreach to Afghan refugee communities to raise awareness of the coronavirus.

Amid these challenging times, arranging large group discussions in the community is not only risky but not permitted. To help overcome this, UNHCR announced the top-up of mobile cards for 3,000 Outreach Volunteers and community mobilizers across the country to strengthen effective digital communication.

The Outreach Volunteers and community mobilizers are Afghan refugees who help disseminate information within their communities. They also carry out important advocacy with the local authorities and service providers.

UNHCR supports around 2,200 Outreach Volunteers and some 800 community mobilizers in Pakistan. Outreach Volunteers, community organizers as well as elders and shuras are all an integral part of UNHCR’s community-based approach, which ensures that refugees play a role in responding to situations that affect their lives.

“The role of Outreach Volunteers in Pakistan is especially instrumental at this time in ensuring that government information on COVID-19 is effectively disseminated through digital channels,” said the Deputy Representative of UNHCR in Pakistan, Mr. Iain Hall. He noted that this is a one-time mobile top-up of Rs.1,000 per person.

The UN Refugee Agency supports the Government of Pakistan’s surveillance, preparedness, and response plans, which include refugees. Together with the Ministry of SAFRON and the Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees, NGO partners are also supporting health education campaigns at the community level and in health facilities in all the refugee villages on COVID-19 prevention and response.
Media contact

Qaiser Khan Afridi - +92 300 5018696 - afridiq@unhcr.org