Introduction:

The report titled "Evaluation of the Mine Clearance Programme in Afghanistan" has been received by MCPA. Although the report is generally considered a commendable document, it is of some considerable concern to MCPA that the document draws conclusions and makes far reaching recommendations regarding the future of MCPA, based on a single brief visit by each member of the evaluation team. Although the report covers most aspects of the programme, it is considered necessary to make comment on several points within the report that are inaccurate. MCPA believes that the value of the document will be substantially greater if these comments were to be incorporated into a separate amendment sheet and distributed on the same scale as the original document.

THE TEAM

The team consisted of two experts in the fields of management and demining. Probably the most significant deficiency in the team composition was the lack of an expert on matters relating to the current situation in Afghanistan. This third person should, of course, have been an Afghan, not affiliated with the demining programme, with enough awareness of the current tribal, cultural, traditional, political and social affairs of Afghanistan to have guaranteed a more balanced perspective within the report. Although one of the team members had spent considerable time in Pakistan, working on projects related to Pakistan, he has had no direct contact with people living inside Afghanistan. Moreover, today's Afghanistan and the way of life of it's inhabitants, are not the same as before the war. It is very difficult for a Westerner to understand the circumstances and conditions and its effect on the programme.

PERIOD OF THE EVALUATION:

Although one month appears to be a reasonable period of time for such an evaluation of the demining programme, after taking into consideration the amount of travel that was required of the team, and the complex nature of the situation, it is felt that insufficient time was available to the evaluation team to do the programme complete justice. MCPA offers the following example: Mr. Freedman visited MCPA twice and Col. Florence visited us only once, during a holiday (Eid), which again indicates a lack of familiarity with Muslim ways. At approx. 09:00 when I was
planning to go out and visit some of my family members, I got a call, at my residence, from demining HQ Peshawar that Col. Florence is scheduled to visit MCPA today at 13:30. Each visit lasted about one hour. The interview consisted of asking me some elementary questions only, and no other MCPA senior staff was met. Files and record keeping systems were neither looked at nor checked. When they were asked to do so they indicated their lack of time and stated that they had other appointments to get to. My concern is that I do not believe that an operation such as MCPA can be fairly evaluated as a result of a one hour interview of any single person.

THE SETTING

Page 16, para. 2

The report states that "in addition to demining teams and their support staff, including medical teams with ambulance, there were two survey teams from Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA) also working along the river bed producing additional maps for demining teams to work further up the hillsides".

The mentioned surveyed area is minefield No 24/2402/11/023 in Spin Boldak of Kandahar province which is an agricultural land irrigated by rain water. Rain irrigated lands are one of the biggest resources throughout Afghanistan especially in south western part of the country. This point does not appear to be acknowledged by the evaluation team.

It should also be mentioned that there was only one survey team not two. I can only hope that the rest of the information provided in the report is more accurate.

REPATRIATION

Page 19, para. 2

The report says "The UNHCR Monthly Repatriation Digest keeps up to date reports on Paktia, Nengarhar, Logar, Kunar, Qandahar, Kabul, Kunduz and Baghlan. In each of these, there has been a similar pattern. An original repatriation flow occurred in August, September and October 1990. There has been no demining activities at that time."

The authors of the report should note that practical demining activities started on January 2nd, 1990 in Kunar province and in July 1990 in Kandahar province. Both the dates are prior to August 1990. The far reaching implications, for MCPA, of this report may ultimately be based on information such as this, which is erroneous.
FRIGHTENING FIGURES

It should be noted that the priorities for demining activities have already been set up in the sectorial meeting of demining on June 6, 1991.

Village level demining will be impossible to implement in the present situation where there is no central authority (central government) to have strong control on the process. This situation could easily have been explained had there been an authority on the Afghan situation included in the evaluation team.

The authors of the report, understandably, have used estimated figures only throughout the report. These figures can be quite misleading. No body knows what the real situation is and to draw too many conclusions from them is a dangerous practice.

MCPA has proposed to undertake a General Survey of the Mines Situation in Afghanistan. This proposed project is strongly recommended for funding. By the completion of the above mentioned project there will be sufficient information to assist us in long term planning.

FUNDING, MANAGEMENT AND LONG-TERM PLANNING

I believe that here again the authors were faced with a lack of sufficient accurate information.

The demining programme has had only two main programme managers, General Bekin and Jan Haugland. The first was called Controller Demining Programme and the last one is Programme Manager Demining. Col Lythgo was deputy to General Bekin, not a separate controller and Rea McGrath was only a consultant to the programme during General Bekin, he has never been Programme Manager. Again, it is inaccuracies such as this that detract from the thrust of the report.
2. Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA)

As mentioned earlier the evaluators had only a short interview with one person from the organization, namely myself. Some information quoted in the report, such as; (1) all minefield maps are produced on the basis of interviews, and (2) MCPA deploys ten two member teams, are incorrect and this information was not provided by me.

1. MCPA of course interviews local people but this is not the sole basis of our programme. MCPA surveyors take a local who knows the area and has lived there for many years. They then walk all the suspected mined areas and ask the locals why they suspect there are mines in these areas. The surveyors verify their information by seeing the physical evidence of mines in those fields. In some cases the locals who are providing information for survey teams are those who have either laid mines or have been fighting in these areas for the last eight-ten years. Most of them have lost either friends or members of their families in those areas. The survey teams do not mark and map unconfirmed areas. Since the beginning of 1991, survey teams have started physical proving of each single minefield. Following this proving, they start their technical survey by using mine detector and other equipment such as compasses, binoculars, cameras and measures. In more than 95% of the suspected mined areas our teams have found mines while conducting survey operations. The survey team clear a 2m path around the mined area. Each turning point is marked properly, a bench mark (reference point) is selected for each minefield. Once the area around the mined area is marked and the bearings and distances are recorded then the surveyors make the map of the area. This is a comprehensive technical method which is adopted after many practical trials in the field. This method has also been developed with the direct advice and technical support of experts from demining headquarters as well as our own expatriate experts, most of whom have had more than 25 years of experience in demining. So, to state that the maps are made purely on the basis of interviews, is another inaccurate statement that may have far reaching consequences for MCPA.

It is also mentioned in the report that (The evaluation team has found these maps are inadequate in a number of regards (see section 4). They often cover areas which are larger than the actual area affected by mines. They rarely attempt to show patterns. Maps are drawn on the basis of insufficient information. It has also been found that the MCPA does not carry out the monitoring functions in a regular and effective manner. In spite of the best of attention, completion reports of demining
agencies are not effectively recorded by MCPA. In short, the very critical coordination between MCPA, headquarters and demining agencies falls well short of what is required.

The concerns of the authors which are explained in the paragraph above, are again a reflection of their lack of sufficiently accurate information. In early 1990, when the teams had just started their operations and had little experience, there may have been some instances when the minefields were marked a little larger than was necessary as a result of the newly trained surveyors trying not to leave any mine out of the marked area. After two-three months, with the consequent increase in experience this practice stopped. In this paragraph the author criticizes MCPA for not recording the completion reports of the various demining agencies. On page 36, paragraph 3, of the report, the authors themselves assist in explaining this situation by stating that "And completion reports are not always forwarded to MCPA or headquarters in peshawar". The lack of communications between demining agencies is acknowledged, but this cannot be attributed singularly to MCPA. If information from demining agencies is not provided to MCPA, we cannot record it. As far as relations between MCPA, headquarters and demining agencies are concerned, here again the authors are faced with a lack of information or perhaps they have received inaccurate information. I explained to the evaluators and would like to reinforce the fact that the relationship between MCPA and headquarters has never fallen short. Since the establishment of MCPA we have always had a liaison officer attached to MCPA from demining headquarters. Some of them have even been employed full time with MCPA.

Relation between MCPA and demining agencies have greatly improved. There were some misunderstanding in early 1990, when the operation was very young but no short fall in relations exist since late 1990. MCPA, ATC and SWAAD are also in close contact with each other. All technical and political problems, if any, are solved with the cooperation between these agencies. Meetings at directors and /or operation officer level are held frequently to discuss and agree on operational plans. Offices have been shifted and located close to each other to insure close contact. Field level relations are notably good. All demining teams are briefed on site by survey teams and a copy of minefield map and report is submitted to demining teams on site. The shortfalls referred to in the report are not specific and MCPA is at a loss to understand where these shortfalls exist.
It is to be noted that many of the points discussed in this section of the report have already been implemented for quite some time, but perhaps due to a lack of time, the authors were not able to witness these matters during the time of their mission.

Collecting and analyzing data is a priority task for MCPA and it has been carried out successfully with the technical support of senior technical advisor of the programme as well as MCPA international staff (see MCPA comments on The demining Confederation of Organizations above).

Once again, I would like to stress that insufficient time was devoted for the evaluation of MCPA. The team members were unable to go through our records or files due to lack of time. Similarly, when a complete set of documents, including MCPA standard operation procedures SOP, and reporting formats were made available to a member of the team so that he could peruse them when he found the time, he did not take them with himself but left them behind at the office of OMA's director. I was aware only a week ago that the documents provided by MCPA were not looked at and that they were still at OMA.

As far as record keeping is concerned MCPA is maintaining up to date records of all surveyed mined areas. MCPA maintains all records by three different means

1. Records of narrative reports: All survey reports are filed by district and kept at the operations office. A summary of the reports are also kept in hand for day to day usage.

2. Records of minefield maps: General area maps and sketch maps which also contain the summary of each minefield are kept at the mapping office. All maps of surveyed minefields are filed districtwise, and attempts are made to get all completion reports of demining teams in order to record them separately. Maps of surveyed areas are filed in red files and cleared areas will be filed in green files.

3. Demining Database: MCPA has programmed a database system which is capable of storing all relevant data required for mine clearance operations. All survey and some clearance data is already loaded. The database can be produced in a variety of formats in accordance with the requirements of UNOCA. How the team can comment on the data analyzing and record keeping system of the programme, if they have not seen the record keeping system operating is something of a mystery.

The authors have recommended that the information of other agencies such as UNHCR, UNIDATA and Mines Advisory Group are to
be used, here again the report proves that it is lacking information. The information by UNIDATA is already in use by the MCPA and we have drawn some good results of it.

Close contacts have been maintained with UNHCR. Four of our teams have been through special courses conducted by UNHCR (repatriation monitoring course).

The report of Mines Advisory Group is available at MCPA and being used since it was published. And MCPA is a member of ACBAAR, all information about mines and mined areas are passed on to MCPA on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

The single most significant point that MCPA wishes to make from the report is that the evaluation team have drawn many important conclusions from a very shallow knowledge foundation. If the evaluation team had included an authority on Afghan matters and had more time to analyse the workings of organizations such as MCPA then the report would not have included the number of inaccuracies that it did. As the report stands there are many good points to be drawn from it, however, a number of the points made relating to MCPA need to be re-examined with the view of obtaining more accurate and updated information; particularly if the future of MCPA is in the balance. It is requested that you examine the above comments and that the comments be distributed on the same scale as the evaluation report.

Sayed Aqa
Director
Mine Clearance Planning Agency
August 4, 1991