

For immediate release

PRESS RELEASE

Snow removal trucks flown into Afghanistan

Kabul, 23 December 2012

With winter rapidly setting in across Afghanistan, the Government of Japan has flown in three winter service vehicles to clear snow in and around the essential Salang Pass and for the remote Ghor province, helping to create safer conditions.

Salang Pass is an essential element of the country's transportation network, connecting northern and southern Afghanistan. Each winter, however, lives are lost along the pass due to extreme winter and avalanches. Similarly, the Province of Ghor in the Central Highland suffers human and economic losses due to poor infrastructure compounded by harsh cold season.

The three KrAZ-65032 trucks were flown into Kabul in the world's largest cargo plane to help tackle these problems. Each is valued at \$200,000 and is equipped with a snow plough, salt and sand spreader. These are the first of eight snow clearance trucks that are being purchased and delivered to Kabul by UNOPS, on behalf of the Japanese government. Six of the trucks will be used to clear snow in Salang Pass, while two trucks will support work in Ghor. The remaining five trucks will be delivered in February. The vehicles are supporting the work of the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) and the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA).

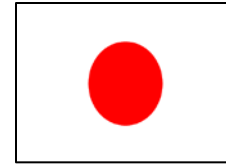


“Flying in the three trucks urgently at a cost of \$515,000, instead of going through the shipping process which would have taken 10 months, is a testimony to the Government of Japan’s long-standing and unwavering commitment to the people of Afghanistan,” said H.E. Mr. Seiji Okada, Chargé d’Affaires of the Embassy of Japan. “Japan, as a disaster prone country which suffers many kinds of natural disasters, including Tsunami and heavy snowfall, is pleased in working with UNOPS to support Afghanistan in taking effective measures for snow clearance and avalanche prevention,” he added.

In a small ceremony, H.E. Mr. Okada handed over the snow clearance vehicles to H.E. Eng. Najibullah Aoudjan, Minister of MPW, in Kabul today. ANDMA Director General Dr. Mohammad Daim Kakar, Mr. Sayed Qazi, ANDMA Director International Relation, and Mr. Mahboobullah Haqbeen, ANDMA Head of Transport and Techniques, also attended the ceremony.



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Highlighting the need, H.E. Eng. Aoudjan said: “We are grateful to the people of Japan for this contribution that Afghanistan is in immediate need of and happy to partner with ANDMA and UNOPS.”

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Kakar said: “In partnership with the Department of Public Works in Ghor and MPW, we hope to be able to save many lives that are lost each year due to harsh winters.” He added that with the construction of equipped rest houses in Salang Pass, loss of human lives has significantly declined and it is another concrete action by the MPW to strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction in Afghanistan.

Hands-on training has also been provided to government personnel for operating and maintaining the vehicles and its parts, as part of the overall objective of developing national capacity in disaster preparedness and road maintenance.

The purchase and delivery of the vehicles by UNOPS is part of its two disaster management and preparedness projects funded by the Japanese government. UNOPS has also provided communication equipment and constructed the ANDMA Ghor Office. These and other activities will go a long way in alleviating the difficult humanitarian situation, while supporting the implementation of the United Nations Humanitarian Action Plan in the country.

UNOPS is also helping MPW ensure year-round functionality of the Salang Pass road network which connects northern and southern Afghanistan. The tunnel, located at an altitude of 3,400 metres in Parwan province, directly affects over one million inhabitants in the region, though the entire country benefits from it. Heavy snowfall and frequent high-risk avalanches prevent free movement through it. With existing resources it takes the MPW up to seven days to clear Salang Pass roads network following a storm. These delays significantly hamper traffic flow and cause immense economic and humanitarian harm. Maintaining the safety and operability of the roads during harsh winter months is, therefore, a key element in Afghanistan’s reconstruction and development that the United Nations is committed to strive towards.

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