AMATC: Sustainable Solutions for Humanitarian Mine Action

Kabul’s Afghan Mine Action Technology Center employs disabled deminers to create demining products. AMATC donates part of its revenue to local physical rehabilitation and treatment facilities, and now employs 11 disabled employees full time.

While clearing unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan’s Herat province, due to a small, inadvertent error, Haroon Khan* lost his right hand and a means of steady employment for the next several years.

“When my right leg, I accidentally kicked a stone,” recalls the 30-year-old native of Eastern Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province. “It set off the mine.”

After he received emergency medical care and, later, a prosthetic arm, Khan remained unemployed for six difficult years. He was forced to borrow money from relatives and others to survive. During that time, however, he took the opportunity to finish his high school education and in early 2008 received a unique opportunity to go back to work.

Clear Path International, a humanitarian mine-action nonprofit organization based in the United States, had just formed the Afghan Mine Action Technology Center in Kabul to offer employment to disabled deminers by creating products designed to be used by the demining industry. In an effort to build credit and develop training programs and to provide disabled deminers with the income to go back to work.

Eleven employees now depend on AMATC for a monthly wage. Besides Khan, there are five technicians, two machinists, one team leader, a driver, and a custodian. CPI and AMATC hope to increase employment as production and sales grow.

In keeping with the center’s mission as an employment program for persons with disabilities, 75 percent of AMATC workers are disabled. Disabled candidates are encouraged to apply for work no matter their disability, as manufacturing tools, procedures and workstations can be modified to accommodate the person’s disability.

“Our newest machinist has developed tools especially for disabled staff,” Fuji says, noting that one technician’s prosthetics was retrofitted to allow him to hold a welding rod and mask.

“For Khan, who has become an unofficial AMATC poster child, the center has been a lifesaver—a means of regaining the dignity he lost after his injury. He is fond of saying ‘Before I had very great depression,’ he says. ‘Now, I don’t have [to feel that way].’

*See endnotes page 81

by Karen Reed-Matthee [Clear Path International]