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PRESS RELEASE

OSCE Office in Tajikistan supports event that aims to create awareness about problem of landmines

DUSHANBE, 3 April 2009 - Landmines pose a threat to security in Tajikistan and elsewhere, Klaus Rasmussen, the Deputy Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, said today at a ceremony held to mark tomorrow's International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

"This is a very important event aimed at drawing the attention of the general public, as well as the international community, to the threat and hidden menace posed by landmines and other unexploded ordnance," he said.

"We must ensure that the cause is kept high on the global political agenda if we are to maintain the momentum toward a landmine-free world, where individuals and communities live in a safe environment conducive to development."

Tajikistan has the largest landmine problem in Central Asia, with more than 15,000,000 square metres of land in need of mine clearing.

Since 2003, at the request of the Tajik Government, the OSCE, through its Office in Tajikistan, has assisted the country in addressing the humanitarian threat posed by landmines. During the last five years, the Office has been the primary supporter of a robust mine clearance, battle area clearance, explosive ordnance disposal and survey activities programme.

Since 2003, 2.3 million square meters of mine-contaminated land and some 11,840 anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance have been destroyed as part of the OSCE Office-supported programme.

Jonmahmad Rajabov, the Head of the Tajik Mine Action Centre, said clearing landmines was beneficial in many ways.

"Clearing landmines contributes to the country's economic and environmental security as more land is available for agriculture and reforestation," he said.

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