



Joint Press Release

Every hour, 3 Afghans lose their vision

Eye camps reach out to the blind across Afghanistan

21 October 2010 | Kabul, AFGHANISTAN – On the occasion of World Sight Day, the Ministry of Public Health and the World Health Organization are launching a series of 10 eye camps to serve the less fortunate population suffering from cataract across Afghanistan. Thanks to a \$90,000 donation from Kuwait's Patients Helping Fund, 2000 cataract surgeries will be performed across the country.

Roughly 1.5 million Afghans are visually impaired, of which almost half million are blind. Every hour, 3 Afghans lose their vision in one of the eyes.

It is estimated that 80% of all blindness in adults is preventable or treatable. In Afghanistan, roughly 60% of all blindness is attributable to age-related cataract, the leading cause of blindness.

Cataract surgery and correction of refractive errors are among the most cost-effective health interventions.

"Eye care facilities are limited to only a few major cities. And the only way to reduce some of the backlog is through outreach programs such as this," said Her Excellency Dr Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health.

"Within minutes and for \$45, a person's eyesight can be restored," said Peter Graaff, WHO Representative to Afghanistan. "Only 16,000 cataract surgeries are performed annually, which is enough to address the number of new cases each year, but not enough to clear the massive backlog of an estimated 200,000 cataract cases."

Blindness is linked to poverty as 90% of blind people live in rural areas and cannot afford the cost of surgery. In turn, the 400,000 cases of blindness contribute \$100 million to the country's economic burden.

The theme of this year's World Sight Day is **Countdown to 2020**, which marks a midpoint in the 20 year roadmap laid out by **VISION 2020: The Right to Sight**, a global initiative launched in 1999 by IAPB and WHO with the aim to eliminate avoidable blindness.

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