

RETURN TO NOSHAQ is a campaign to remove landmines from the Qazideh Valley - the only minefields in the Wakhan District of Afghanistan's Badakhshan Province.

The mines were laid in 2000 by the Northern Alliance to prevent the Taliban from launching an attack on Ishkashim. Taliban at that time were crossing from Pakistan into Badakhshan via other mountain passes, and the Ishkashim commandant wanted to seal any possibility of attack via the nearby Qazideh Valley.

There are three unmarked minefields in the valley. The approximately 1,000 villagers of Qazideh cannot take their livestock into the valley and are afraid to gather fuelwood for cooking and heating their homes from the valley. The landmines also block the route to Noshaq (7492 metres), Afghanistan's highest mountain. Clearing the minefields would reopen the valley for the villagers and eliminate the possibility of any more mine victims. The welcoming of climbers and trekkers back to Noshaq would become a source of national pride for Afghanistan and generate much needed tourism income for residents.

In October 2007, HALO Trust - a nonprofit organization engaged in mineclearance in nine provinces in northern Afghanistan - completed its general and technical surveys of the valley to determine the feasibility for clearing the minefields and prepared a project budget of U.S. \$99,485. The largest part of the budget is \$51,800 for salaries. The project would employ 54 Afghan staff working in two teams for five months. Other budget components include: \$36,277 for operating costs (food, equipment, supplies, medical, communications, insurance); \$4,726 for body armour, detector parts and radios; and \$6,682 for administration. (Additional budget details are available upon request.)

To get this project onto HALO's 2008 work schedule, we need to raise U.S. \$100,000 by March 31st. To complete the project within one calendar year, work would need to start by June 1st. (If the March 31, 2008 fundraising date is missed, the project would shift to the 2009 work schedule with an alternative date of raising funds by March 31, 2009. If for any reason, all funds could not be raised by March 31, 2009, the funds would be allocated to other humanitarian mineclearance projects in Badakhshan.)

Project details should be online in early 2008. Meanwhile, please pass along this information informally by email or word-of-mouth.

How You Can Help

The HALO Trust USA (<http://www.halousa.org>) is overseeing the fundraising campaign and processing donations. (Its sister organization HALO Trust in the U.K. - <http://www.halotrust.org> - is *not* processing donations for this project.)

If you'd like to make a donation, please visit <http://www.halousa.org/help.html>. The web page has instructions to donate to HALO Trust USA by: check, PayPal and/or credit card. HALO plans to update their website shortly, but meanwhile to correctly direct your donation to this project - write "Badakhshan, Afghanistan" in the memo field of a check, or in the "Your wish, dedication or comment" field prompted for PayPal donations, and/or manually add a line to the credit card form indicating the donation is intended for the project identified as "Badakhshan, Afghanistan." Donors will receive tax receipts acknowledging that they specified this project.

Please email any questions about the **RETURN TO NOSHAQ** campaign and Wakhan to returntonoshaq@gmail.com. Thank you for helping the Afghan people.