

## Afghanistan To Eradicate Illegal Armed Groups At Any Cost: President

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By Ahmed Rashid

Afghan President Hamid Karzai vowed on Saturday that his government would eradicate illegal armed groups at any cost. "Backed by Afghan people's strong desire to get rid of all the illegal armed groups in Afghanistan and to make this country safe and prosperous, the government of Afghanistan has committed itself to accomplishing Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) at any cost," said Karzai in a statement issued by his spokesman's office. The DIAG program, which was launched on June 11, 2005, is a process intending to eradicate the influence of illegal armed groups in Afghanistan, thus allowing the consolidation of peace, rule of law and prosperity in the country.

As of early this month, 22,738 weapons, including 14,239 operational weapons, as well as 21,362 rounds of boxed and 190,170 rounds of unboxed ammunition have been handed over to and verified by Afghanistan's New Beginnings Program collection teams.

"While many obstacles lie ahead, I am fully committed to achieving the benchmark of DIAG as stipulated in the Afghanistan Compact. The government of Afghanistan will not allow any disruptions to the implementation of DIAG program," said Karzai. The Afghan president is to leave for Japan next week to attend the conference on the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and DIAG programs. Karzai will also pay an official visit to Tokyo after the conference during which he will meet with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.