significantly high levels of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder,” Dr Cardozo said.

“Sixty-eight percent of people showed signs of depression, 72% had symptoms of anxiety, and 42% had symptoms of post-traumatic stress. As a comparison, levels of depression in the United States are lower at 8–10% and 1–2% for post-traumatic stress,” Dr Cardozo said.

Increasing attacks on humanitarian workers — 32 aid workers have been killed since March 2003 — have put much of the country off-limits to international health-care workers and jeopardize much-needed investment.

“For quite some time we have been unable to get to people in rural areas mainly because of the security issue”, said Jessica Barry from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which provides vital trauma and surgical services in Afghanistan.

“Because of insecurity in rural areas, our work remains limited to large urban centers”, Ms Barry said.

In July, a leading humanitarian organization, Médecins Sans Frontières pulled out of Afghanistan after five of its workers were killed in Badghis province.

But despite the lack of security and shortage of funds, major progress has been made in many areas including policy-making and measles vaccinations, and towards polio eradication.

“The number of polio cases in the country has been reduced to only three this year because of relentless efforts made by WHO, the Afghan Government and others,” said Ahmed Shadoul, a medical officer at WHO Afghanistan.

A good acute flaccid paralysis surveillance system to check for polio is in place all over Afghanistan with more than 450 sentinel sites and about 4400 reporting points.

In August, WHO launched an initiative to reduce in less than two years the incidence of leishmaniasis, a disabling disease transmitted by sand fly which often leads to facial disfigurement. Kabul has 67 500 cases, more than anywhere else in the world.

The project is in cooperation with the Massoud Foundation, an Afghan nongovernmental organization, and Dutch non-profit group HealthNet International and was funded by a donation from the Belgian Government.