

Speech of the Director of Tajikistan Mine Action Centre in the 14th Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, Geneva 2015

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all, using the opportunity, I would like to thank the ISU and the UN Office in Geneva for their contribution in organizing this meeting.

This is a great moment to update you on mine action related activities in Tajikistan. As you may know 93% of Tajikistan's territory is mountainous and only 7% is land that can be used for agriculture and other development related activities. The geographic condition makes the people to depend on these lands.

According to the approved extension period we have little more than 5 years remaining to identify and clear all known mined areas – until 1 April 2020. The areas contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war including cluster munition remnants in Tajikistan are concentrated along the Tajik-Afghan Border and in the Central Region. They are still affecting the lives of the people of Tajikistan. Mines and ERW continue to create problems both in social and economic aspects. The Government of Tajikistan considers mine/ERW related problems as one of the highest priorities.

Based on the available statistics, since 1992 858 people were involved in mine/ERW accidents, out of which 374 people died and 484 people were injured. More than 30% of the overall victims were children at the time of the accident, mostly boys.

Particularly over the last five years Tajikistan's Mine Action Programme has made significant progress in land release activities. Efficiency was improved by introducing new assets and methodologies and by updating the national standards and the SOPs of the operators accordingly.

From the start of the programme in 2003 until the end of 2015, more than 16.2 km² of the land has been released through joint NTS/TS interventions, through mine clearance and TS. 65,624 mines and ERW - out of which 56,351 AP mines, 22 AT mines, 9,300 ERW, 750 cluster sub munitions, 41 kg of explosive charges, and 70,363 small arms cartridges - were identified and

destroyed. In total, 230 hazardous areas were released and handed over to the local authorities for safe use. [If PowerPoint then say:] The diagram in this slide illustrates the annual land release progress.

In 2015, eight (8) demining teams of our land release operators, MoD, NPA and FSD, managed to release nearly 1.8 km². During these operations, they identified and destroyed 556 mines, and 345 ERW. The worsened security situation in Kunduz and other areas in the Northeast of Afghanistan had a negative impact on our output this year: Operations only started in May and had to focus on the Central Region and the Province of GBAO in the East. Operations in Khatlon Province, located on the opposite side to the Kunduz Province, were hardly possible this year: we could only operate in one of its districts.

What remains to be done: as of December 2015, 70 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) contaminated by AP mines with an approximate total size of 5.72 km² and 101 unsurveyed minefield records remain in 17 Districts.

- Along the Tajik-Afghan border 60 CHAs in 11 Districts remain with an approximate total size of 3.98 km²
- In the Central Region ten (10) CHAs in 6 Districts remain with an approximate total size of 1.74 km². Although these areas are located in hard-to-reach mountaintops, they can be cleared during the brief summer period.
- 101 unsurveyed minefield records from districts along the Afghan border need to be surveyed and if confirmed subsequently cleared. Based on desk analysis this is an additional area of approximately 3.6 km², which contains 57,189 recorded AP mines.

Besides mined areas, battle areas remain to be addressed in the Central Region covering an area of approximately 2.3 km².

Therefore, we expect that a total area of 8 km² (5.7 CHAs + 2.3 BAC areas) of known hazardous areas needs to be cleared plus up to 3.6 km² of areas still to be surveyed.

Tajikistan developed an Article 5 Completion Plan that describes the multifaceted and serious dimensions of the mine problem in Tajikistan, specifies the institutions involved in its implementation and the funds required. The plan provides a timetable for addressing the remaining confirmed hazard areas and unsurveyed minefield records. It describes the contamination encountered and the specific challenges for survey and clearance in Tajikistan:

- Many minefields are located in hard-to-reach areas.
- Because of the harsh winter, the operational season generally lasts only 8 months, but in the mountainous Central Region only 3 months or even less.

Tajikistan expects to count on at least 14 demining teams (including one female team) and at least 2 NTS teams.

Over the past years we managed to release approximately 2 km² per year. To address the remaining 10+ km² (including the BAC area) five years would suffice. However, all contaminated areas suitable for employing mine detection dogs and mechanical demining assets are completed now and clearance rates are likely to be lower from now on.

We will do our best to finish even before 1 April 2020. We are improving our efficiency wherever possible but we do need continued international support. We thank the continued support of the United States of America and of Norway as well as for the support provided by UNDP, OSCE and the ICRC. We are glad to report that the Government of Tajikistan has started to provide direct funds to the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre in its annual budgets over the past 2 years – on top of various types of in-kind-contribution.

On behalf of the Republic of Tajikistan, I would like to thank all our donors for their great contribution to the Tajikistan Mine Action Programme since 2003. Also, we present our highest gratitude and appreciation to the international agencies that have been involved in implementation of mine action program in Tajikistan.

Thank you for your attention!