



**Mine Action Review Comments on Extension Request submitted by Serbia
(delivered by NPA on behalf of Mine Action Review)**

**Agenda Item 4: Matters related to the mandate of the Committee on Article 5 Implementation
APMBC Intersessional Meetings, 18–20 June 2024**

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am delivering this statement on behalf of Mine Action Review.

We thank Serbia for its presentation. This is Serbia's fourth, but not final extension request. During the two-year extension requested, Serbia plans to complete clearance of previously known mined area and conduct survey to determine the nature and extent of the suspected mined area discovered during fires in October 2019 and August 2021. It will then submit a further extension request in 2026 which will include a work plan for completion of survey and clearance of this remaining area.

Serbia had planned to begin non-technical survey in 2023 of the newly discovered mined areas, but we understand this was delayed. The newly discovered suspected mined area is located in the Ground Safety Zone along the administrative line with Kosovo and Metohija. It would be useful to know if the delay to NTS was due to security concerns, and also whether Serbia expects security concerns to further impede its ability to complete NTS by the end of October 2025 and to then develop a plan for technical and clearance, as per its work plan.

Serbia's preference to-date has been to conduct full clearance, rather than technical survey, on hazardous areas, but Serbia has stated its willing to conduct technical survey where appropriate. However, in 2021, 2022, and 2023 Serbia cleared mined area without finding any anti-personnel mines. We urge Serbia to strive to ensure land release is conducted according to international best practice (i.e. using evidence based technical survey to confirm contamination or otherwise to reduce the mined area if no evidence of mines is found during technical survey, rather than wasting valuable time and resources on full clearance of uncontaminated land when it is not necessary). Mine Action Review hopes that a new Decree which introduces the concept of land release and which foresees development of Serbian national mine action standards, is adopted by the Serbian government without delay, to help promote efficient land release.

Serbia specifies that ethnic mix of the planned survey teams, which is an important diversity consideration, but there is no mention of the planned gender mix of the teams. We encourage SMAC to provide plans for gender mainstreaming. We also encourage SMAC to provide information on environmental considerations of its land release operations.

Lastly, Serbia's extension request makes reference to suspected improvised mine contamination dating from the 1990s in the Sava River, in the area of the Jamena Village. Serbia should clarify whether these improvised devices meet the definition of an anti-personnel mine, and if they do, Serbia should include additional information on this SHA in its extension request.

Thank you.