Azerbaijan

Country Profile

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Armenia

by Joseph Keane | Mine Action Information Center

Armenia has been gaining strength and stability since recovering from the 1988 Spitak earthquake, the collapse of the USSR and Turkey’s trade embargo. The country experienced economic depression in the 1990s due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic disintegration and Turkey’s trade embargo. In recent years, the economy around, creating positive growth rates from 1995 to 2006. As a member of the European Union, Armenia is moving out of the post-Soviet era and into the international stage. Part of becoming a modern nation is removing all possible threats to development. Landmines and unexploded ordnance are a threat to every aspect of development in Armenia.

Current Landmine Situation

The majority of Armenia’s landmines and UXO are a result of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict (1988–1994) over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in southwest Armenia. Following the ceasefire, the Armenian Army surveyed the border where most landmines were placed and estimated that there were from 50,000 to 80,000 active landmines. The two countries have not signed a peace treaty and Armenia reports hotspots. Sixty communities with a total covered a combined 321.7 square kilometers. The Development Programme, the European Union Special Program for Armenia, the Ministry of Defense and is in charge of mine action in Armenia. UNDP–Armenia, as the driving force behind much of Armenia’s mine action, works in coordination with the national government and humanitarian organizations to achieve a “safer, more efficient, and effective implementation of mine-action components.”

Other organizations working on mine action in Armenia include the Marshall-White Legacy Institute, which introduced a Mine Detecting Dog Partnership Program in Armenia in 2002 to use handlers and professional dogs capable of “sniffing out” explosives in landmines and UXO. The Inter-Agency Governmental Coordination and the Ministry of Defense have recently completed a three-year plan to coordinate and implement a demining program. The goals of 2006 were “conducting a Technical Survey, Marking and Clearance (one community, as a pilot project); conducting a public awareness campaign and mine-risk education in mine-affected areas; conducting targeted victim assistance in mine-affected areas; supporting the Armenian Humanitarian Demining Centre; and assisting the government of Armenia in drafting a national mine action strategy and legislation.” Armenia faces a number of challenges in demining. Weather permits landmine clearance for only six months per year, from May to October. Of the 18 person-teams, only two are active in Armenia; the third is currently working in Iraq. In October 2005 100 experts in Mine Action conducted the leading factors for the lack of mine action. The committee concluded that “limited national expertise and funding” were the greatest obstacles to a national mine-action strategy. These are contributing factors, according to the Ministry of Defense, for less than one square kilometer having been cleared since 2003.2

Mine-action Organizations in Armenia

The Armenian Humanitarian Demining Center was created in March 2002 through a joint effort of the Departments of State and Defense. The Center is a part of the Armenian Ministry of Defense and is in charge of mine action in Armenia. UNDP–Armenia, as the driving force behind much of Armenia’s mine action, works in coordination with the national government and humanitarian organizations to achieve a “safer, more efficient, and effective implementation of mine-action components.” The Inter-Agency Governmental Coordination and the Ministry of Defense have recently completed a three-year plan to coordinate and implement a demining program. The goals of 2006 were “conducting a Technical Survey, Marking and Clearance (one community, as a pilot project); conducting a public awareness campaign and mine-risk education in mine-affected areas; conducting targeted victim assistance in mine-affected areas; supporting the Armenian Humanitarian Demining Centre; and assisting the government of Armenia in drafting a national mine action strategy and legislation.” Armenia faces a number of challenges in demining. Weather permits landmine clearance for only six months per year, from May to October. Of the 18 person-teams, only two are active in Armenia; the third is currently working in Iraq. In October 2005 100 experts in Mine Action conducted the leading factors for the lack of mine action. The committee concluded that “limited national expertise and funding” were the greatest obstacles to a national mine-action strategy. These are contributing factors, according to the Ministry of Defense, for less than one square kilometer having been cleared since 2003.2

Over the past few years, the Inter-Agency Governmental Coordination has conducted the leading factors for the lack of mine action. The committee concluded that “limited national expertise and funding” were the greatest obstacles to a national mine-action strategy. These are contributing factors, according to the Ministry of Defense, for less than one square kilometer having been cleared since 2003.2

Looking Ahead

Armenia has set up a mine-action strategy for 2006–2011, based on “the assumption that the nature of the mine problem requires more effective risk management through continuous assessment of the situation and effective planning and coordination.”4 As of the specific goals being accomplished through cooperation with the international organizations listed above (UNDP, IOM, and ICRC) are the leading factors for the lack of mine action. The committee concluded that “limited national expertise and funding” were the greatest obstacles to a national mine-action strategy. These are contributing factors, according to the Ministry of Defense, for less than one square kilometer having been cleared since 2003.2

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Azerbaijan

by Kateland Shane | Mine Action Information Center

From 1988 to 1994, Azerbaijan was engaged in an armed conflict with its neighboring country and both sides used landmines. Forces from both Armenia and the self-declared Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh fought an 11-year war. About 20 percent of land in Azerbaijan, making demining difficult in these areas.

The Landmine/UXO Threat

The 2002–2005 Azerbaijan Landmine Impact Survey conducted in accessible territories identified an extensive mine and unexploded ordnance problem with a reported 970 suspected hazardous areas and heavy contamination along the ceasefire line and the border of Armenia. The survey recognized a total of 38 affected districts. The extent of the threat in the occupied territories is unknown, although the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense estimates the amount of contaminated land would be “anywhere between 350 and 850 million square meters (350 to 320 square miles).” The types of mines found in Azerbaijan include not only anti-tank and antipersonnel mines, but also homemade mines and field-charges.4

In addition to mines, remains from the abandoned Soviet depots and stockpiles are scattered all over the country. One of the most serious contaminations involves a massive Soviet liquid-fuel rocket launchpad destroyed in the Agtafa region that resulted in the contamination of 44 square meters (17 square miles). After demining its December 2000, it has been cleared and is in use.1

The exact number of mine/UXO casualties in Azerbaijan is not known, but there are believed to be over 3,000 victims. Of the victims, over 200 were children and 1,300 are believed to have died. In 2006, mine/UXO casualties were at a 10-year high in Azerbaijan.3

The Ottawa Process

While the Republic of Armenia continued to be recognized as one of the Ottawa countries until the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has been resolved, it has shown support for many terms of the Convention.3 Azerbaijan states that it is already satisfying some conditions of the Convention because it does not produce or transfer anti-personnel mines and it actively supports the demining and victim-assistance activities. Azerbaijan also is not party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.


Although Azerbaijan has not signed the Ottawa Convention, ANAMA has developed a National Strategic Plan based on the 2003 Landmine Impact Survey to help meet clearance objectives within the timeframe of the Convention. This includes both short- and long-term strategic plans for mine action in Azerbaijan in the areas of clearance, mine-risk education and victim assistance.3

Mine Clearance

At the end of April 2007, ANAMA reported that about 479 million square meters (181.8 square miles) of accessible land had been cleared or cleared of landmines and UXO. It had identified 970 suspected hazard areas and heavy contamination along the ceasefire line and the border of Armenia. The survey recognized a total of 38 affected districts. The extent of the threat in the occupied territories is unknown, although the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense estimates the amount of contaminated land could be anyplace between 350 and 850 million square meters (350 to 320 square miles). The types of mines found in Azerbaijan include not only anti-tank and antipersonnel mines, but also homemade mines and field-charges.4

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In response to the contamination in Agtafa, ANAMA launched the Salgolu Project jointly with the NATO Mine Action and Supply Agency, a UXO clearance project set to begin its second phase in April 2007. The project, a NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund project, is set to destroy 5.6 square kilometers (2.1 square miles) of contaminated land around the Salgolu and Novaya villages.3

Victim Assistance

In 2005, 21 victims received training in management, medicine, small business, mine-risk education and computer literacy. An additional 20 mine survivors also volunteered to help with the project, which ended in May 2007. In 2007, with the financial support of the U.S. OS, the IEPE plans to establish other branches of the Association and ensure their sustainability.5 Following a 2005 needs assessment survey, ANAMA and other NGOs also organized several recent MVA projects in Azerbaijan.6

Conclusion

With the existence of such an organized and dedicated mine-action program, the mine and UXO threat in Azerbaijan is slowly decreasing. ANAMA and other organizations continue to work with the Universal Mine Ban Initiative, UNICEF, and the UN Mine Action Office to ensure the recovery of survivors and the prevention of new UXO accidents.

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