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International Eurasia Press Fund Works in Azerbaijan

Problems with explosive remnants of war in Azerbaijan stem from emplacement of mines by the Soviet Union between 1988 and 1994. Mines were used along Azerbaijan’s expansive border region and military installations. More recently, ERW have been left behind from Azerbaijan’s battles over territorial integrity. The International Eurasia Press Fund has developed a program to address the needs of mine victims in one of the country’s most heavily mined regions. The Mine Victims’ Association of the Terter district is working to rehabilitate victims in numerous ways, providing participants with the skills and information they need to lead productive, independent lives that take full advantage of their individual talents and interests.

by Geary Cox [Mine Action Information Center]

The IEPF has been instrumental in the rehabilitation of a mine-plagued Azerbaijan, providing or facilitating countless post-conflict remedies to a war-torn country. In the past, the IEPF has conducted Level One Landmine Survey programs in areas affected by war, a Landmine Impact Survey, and several other mine-action programs. With the financial support of the European Commission, the IEPF conducted the “Mine Victims Needs Assessment Survey” project in 2004 to determine the most pressing needs of the Azeri people. Based on its 2004 survey, the IEPF determined that most mine victims in the country required more post-rehabilitation assistance; medical services were deemed adequate for mine victims, but support following the survey period seemed lacking.

Extent of the Problem

Surveys were conducted in 629 villages and 29 enclosures in 11 war-torn regions of Azerbaijan. More than 74,000 people were interviewed to accurately define hazardous areas, needs of the population and initial statistics concerning mine victims. Umud Mirzoyev, IEPF Chairman, says the surveys indicated more than half a million people in 643 communities were affected by 970 square kilometers (376 square miles) of land in 2005. The IEPF also conducted 10 MRE sessions in 2005. Tapping into these efforts and other experiences, the IEPF developed a three-year strategic plan and outlined goals for the Working and Initiative Groups of the MVA. An Intermediate Report based on the organization’s progress between 15 August and 31 December 2006 was produced and distributed.

Genesis of the MVA

In conjunction with the completion of the Mine Victims’ Needs Assessment, the IEPF devised an extensive experience in providing humanitarian aid and demining efforts, IEPF sought to further its humanitarian development activities. The MVA laid out a three-year strategic plan and outlined goals for the Working and Initiative Groups of the MVA. An Intermediate Report based on the organization’s progress between 15 August and 31 December 2006 was produced and distributed.

MVA Informational Seminars and Workshops

Intensive training was provided to the Initiative Group in a number of areas, all designed to rehabilitate mine victims, reintegrate them into society and improve standards of living in the region.

IEPF has facilitated media roundtables, meetings and conferences. Additionally, it has published several books, brochures and other informational materials to provide objective coverage of the ranges of war on Azerbaijan. Coverage has also been directed at the suffering of refugees and internally displaced persons.

IEPF Focus Areas

Working with several national and international partners, the IEPF devised a solution to meet the needs of the mine-affected population and create the Mine Victims’ Association of the Terter district. The IEPF used its extensive experience in demining, mine-risk education and other mine-related projects to form the basis for the MVA. ANAMA had contracted the IEPF to survey and demine mine-clearance operations—the IEPF worked predominantly in the Terter district with a 36-member demining team and cleared 758,947 square meters (0.29 square mile) of land in 2005. The IEPF also conducted 10 MRE sessions in 2005. Tapping into these efforts and other experiences, the IEPF developed a three-point infrastructure.

1. Media and civil-society development
2. Peacemaking and conflict action
3. Refugee/IDP communities and community development

Refugee/IDP communities and community development. IEPF efforts in this area have included the analysis of migration problems, resolving refugee/IDP problems and working in community-development activities. Working under the direction of the President of Azerbaijan, the IEPF constantly seeks to improve the quality of life for refugees and internally displaced persons, and to provide for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Evidence of success is seen in the Community Mine Action Team at the IEPF, nearly 40 percent of which is composed of refugees/IDPs.

Law and management. Legal advisers from the Working Group educated participants on international documents on human rights, advocacy mechanisms for human rights in Azerbaijan and in the international community, juridical standing of mine victims and other necessary legal information. Participants were also advised on the organization, establishment and operation of unions and other management appearances. Group members are currently active in the process of establishing these managerial infrastructures. Close collaboration with officials has allowed MVA participants to receive necessary assistance from social programs.

First-aid training. Regular instruction was given to participants in the application of first-aid techniques, including fractures/dislocations, nursing patients with amputations, bleeding/wounds, frostbite and sundry burn types. They also were taught about blood-pressure measurements and providing hypodermics, intravenous and intra-venuous injections. Information on general hygiene rules, treatment of diabetic patients and other basic medical procedures was provided. The program’s medical adviser regularly visits mine victims and their families, sometimes sending the more seriously injured to treatment centers in Baku.

Small-business development. Initiative Group members participated in extensive training on themes directly associated with developing small businesses. They learned about financing, marketing, opportunity analysis, advertising and other business practices. Participants also had the option of submitting business plans to Working Group staff members for advice and evaluation; all business plans received specific to the Terter district. The business plans dealt mostly with grain growing, cattle breeding, poultry raising, beehkeeping and carpet weaving. Further collaboration will help to bring these business plans to fruition.

Mine-risk education. General information on the landmine/UOO problem in Azerbaijan was also a component of the MVA education. Participants were informed about the threat to the populace from landmines and the physical, psychological, and economic effects of the mine problem. Members of the Initiative Group expressed interest in the IEPF’s mine-risk education activities. The MVA laid out a three-year strategic plan and outlined goals for the Working and Initiative Groups of the MVA. An Intermediate Report based on the organization’s progress between 15 August and 31 December 2006 was produced and distributed.

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The Mine Victims’ Association was established 15 May 2006, and its training and development sessions have been incredibly successful. The Working Group for the MVA provided the professional specialities necessary for seminars and workshops and included legal experts, computer specialists, medical advisers, MRE specialists, accountants, support managers and a project coordinator. Seminars were held for an Initiative Group of 10 landmine survivors selected from the total eligible population of mine victims.
Further Collaboration

As an offshoot of their initial training sessions, participants in the Mine Victims’ Association process began collaborating with journalists, doctors, local politicians and representatives of national and international media. Group members expressed a desire to improve and expand the initiative among mine victims to provide necessary assistance on a regular basis. Plans were solidified for the future activities of the MVA, including activities in several Terter district villages. In November 2006, members of the national and international media were invited to the Terter region to become acquainted with the work of the IEPF and the Azerbaijani National Agency for Mine Action. Meetings with orthodox representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross were held in December 2006 to better understand the needs of mine victims in the Terter region. The dialogue resulted in the recognition of a need for regional specialists in orthopedics since the nearest facility, in Baku, is too distant for many mine victims. In meetings with local police leaders and executive members, mine victims participated in direct dialogue with the authorities responsible for addressing the mine problem in the Terter district and across Azerbaijan. Authorities noted concerns surrounding the demarcation of territory, provision of social and medical assistance and other issues related to problems facing mine victims.

A meeting between ANAMA and members of the MVA was held in November 2006 to discuss the successes of the association to date. The sustainability of the MVA was one of the most pressing issues, including the broader goal of assisting mine victims throughout Azerbaijan.

Mine-victim Entrepreneurs

Many of the participants in the MVA seminars have started or furthered their own businesses in the Terter district based on information and support provided in the workshops. Three participants—Nizami Bardary, Khalil Hatamov and Mohammed Ashin—are currently involved with seedling activities and one—Nura Goulier— is engaged in beekeeping. Most of the mine-victim entrepreneurs make four to five times their annual pensions from their salaries.

Despite their injuries, these mine victims are actively contributing to their local economies—and they are a part of a larger trend toward increased personal independence with vital assistance programs. Beyond providing valuable services, these entrepreneurs are integrating into society and serving as models for other mine victims.

Long-term Goals and Enduring Challenges

Unสวม Mirtayyev is proud of the accomplishment of the Mine Victims’ Association in the Terter district of Azerbaijan, but much remains to be accomplished in assisting mine victims and their families integrate fully into society.

Mirtayyev says the MVA will help establish more agricultural units in accordance with mine victims’ business plans, conduct vocational courses for victims and their family members, and provide new job placements to further improve socioeconomic status. All of these undertakings will be accomplished “to support the mine victims as they settle their most important problems,” he adds.3 Plans are already underway to improve the repair process on problematic field appliances, Mirtayyev says. “Mine victims have to leave for Baku or Ganja cities, and, of course, they have some difficulties in doing it,” he says.4 The IEPF is currently preparing information on how easy repairs can be made without the need for extensive travel. But all problems have not been easy to solve.

Mirtayyev notes that providing assistance to mine victims who must be treated and rehabilitated abroad is incredibly difficult. The MVA also faces difficulty in implementing the prepared business plans for seminar participants. ‘Great support is needed to improve the mine victims’ socioeconomic state, to establish their farm units, to realize individual business plans and to assign social aid to mine victims in poor living conditions,’ he says.5

There is also the problem of addressing the needs of mine victims in other regions of the country. Regional branch offices will soon start to tackle complex vocational, medical, juridical and social problems in other areas of Azerbaijan. The IEPF is looking to expand further to give greater attention to other villages as branch offices of the Azerbaijani Mine Victims’ Association are prepared in Aghstafa, Baku and Fuzuli. See Endnotes, Page 1a

The Expectations and Challenges Ottawa Presents

The journey referred to involves addressing both external and internal expectations. When a state ratifies or accedes to the Convention, externally, other states expect that state to fulfill the obligations it has freely accepted. In addition, internally, a state’s population will also expect the state to do what is obliged of it to end the suffering and casualties caused by AP mines. Thus, the expectations are high because the states of this region have in recent memory experienced the devastation of armed conflict in which anti-personnel mines have been used and have remained as a deadly legacy. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina remarked in December 1997, all parties to war in that country supported the Ottawa Convention “because we experienced the pain of AP mines and we know that we should do everything not to allow this to happen again.”

The challenges, however, are great not only due to the magnitude of the problems, but also because fulfilling state responsibilities has been complicated in SEE. For instance, every state in the region has recently been in some form of transition in terms of the establishment or re-establishment of state structures or in terms of transition...