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## Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action

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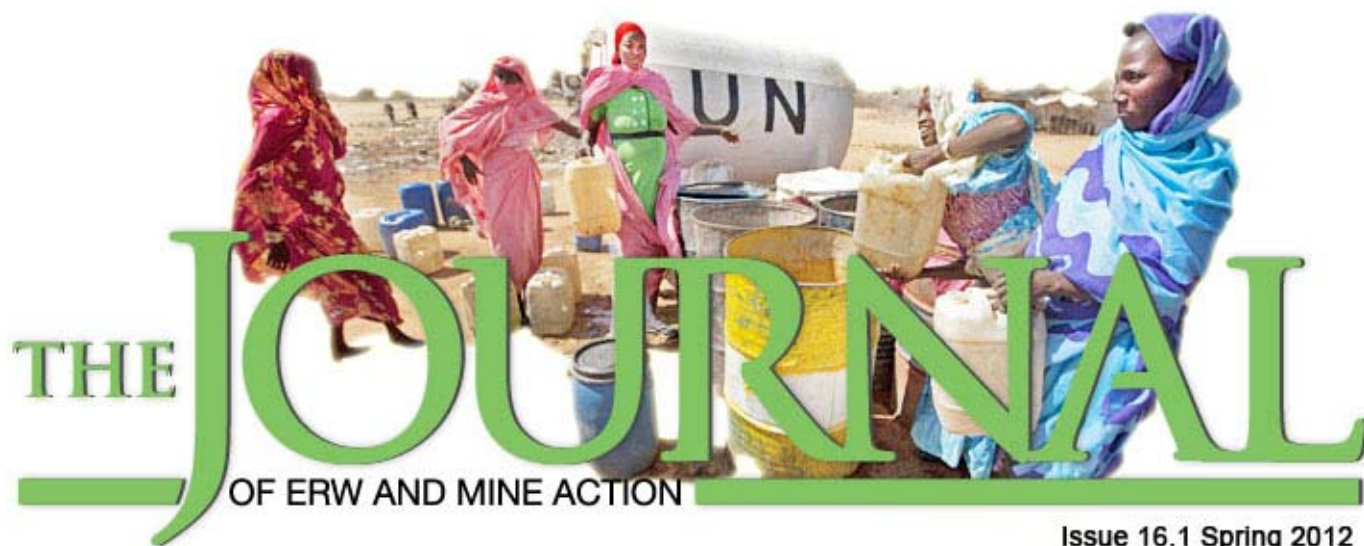
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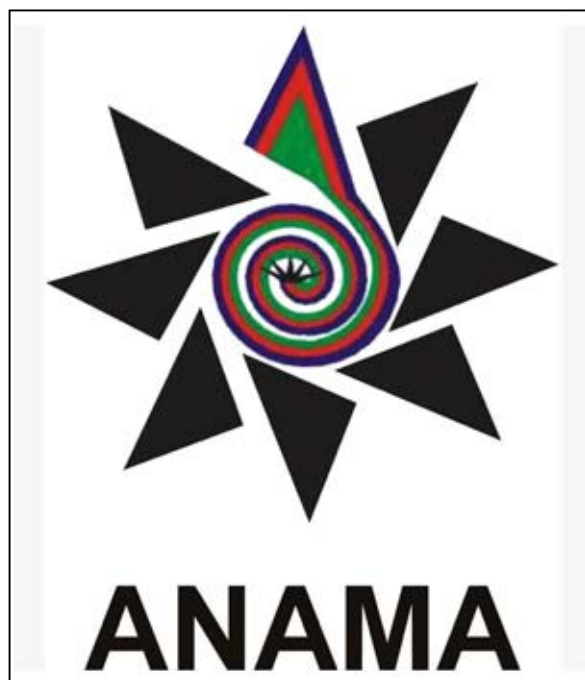
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## Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action

In 1994, hostilities between Armenian forces and the Azerbaijani military ceased. Although a lasting peace agreement is still being negotiated, this ending marked the beginning of a long process of landmine and unexploded-ordnance removal in the region bordering Armenia. In 1999, the Government of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Development Programme signed an agreement that established the Azerbaijan Mine Action Programme to deal with landmine and unexploded ordnance clearance. The implementing agency of the Azerbaijan Mine Action Programme is the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action, which is responsible for the planning, coordination, management and monitoring of all mine-action activities in Azerbaijan. ANAMA's goal is "to create indigenous capacity to undertake survey, mapping and clearance in currently liberated areas and to prepare for dealing with the UXO problem in occupied areas after their liberation."<sup>1</sup>

To understand the extent of Azerbaijan's contamination, ANAMA undertook a Landmine Impact Survey from September 2002 to June 2003. The survey identified more than 736 million square meters (284 square miles) of contaminated land. However, the government ordered a re-survey in 2006, which reduced this figure to 306 million square meters (118 sq. mi.) of land. At the end of 2009, clearance and land-release operations led to the safe return of almost half this land; ANAMA now estimates only 184 million square meters (45,467 acres) of land are suspected-hazard areas—land likely contaminated with landmines and/or UXO. However, these numbers only include land occupied by Azerbaijani forces, and ANAMA suspects land occupied by Armenian forces is contaminated with 50,000–100,000 landmines.<sup>2</sup>



### ANAMA's Principles

ANAMA seeks to make Azerbaijani land safe for the return of internally displaced persons and recognizes that mine-free land is crucial for the development of agriculture, commerce and infrastructure. Headquartered in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, ANAMA maintains two regional offices, three operational centers and employs a 602-person staff. Its projects focus on three main areas similar to the strategies of many mine-action organizations: clearance and land release, mine-risk education and mine-victim assistance.<sup>1</sup> In all three areas, ANAMA operates according to the following principles:

1. **Safety.** Safety is the overriding principle and refers to the safety of deminers in the field and of civilians returning to their land after clearance. To protect both groups, ANAMA always adheres to the International Mine Action Standards as well as Azerbaijan's national mine-action standards, which are consistent with IMAS.
2. **Effectiveness.** This principle refers to the degree to which clearance operations achieve their desired outcomes. ANAMA ensures this effectiveness through "systematic data gathering and processing, considering community needs, [and] adherence to national mine action prioritization criteria."<sup>3</sup> ANAMA also seeks open consultation and coordination with development and aid organizations, by which it can track its successes and remedy its failures.
3. **Efficiency.** Efficiency refers to the cost-effectiveness of clearance operations in Azerbaijan. ANAMA always works to enhance training, set realistic priorities and goals, improve operational procedures and strategically allocate resources.<sup>3</sup>

### **ANAMA Operations**

In the area of clearance, ANAMA made a great deal of progress, clearing and releasing 131,111,423 square meters (50.62 sq. mi.) of minefields and 52,504,256 square meters (20.27 sq. mi.) of battle areas. From this land, 241 anti-personnel landmines, 424 anti-tank mines and 665,201 items of UXO were recovered and destroyed. ANAMA estimates that these clearance operations directly benefitted around 100,000 civilians, who can begin rebuilding their communities and economies.<sup>1</sup>

ANAMA's Special Operations Team continues operations in the former ammunitions-storage area in the Qaradagh region of Baku, which accidentally exploded in 1991, scattering thousands of UXO pieces throughout the surrounding areas.<sup>4</sup> In August 2011, the Special Operations Team started battle-area clearance in the territory called Kirdagh Mud Volcano, a state resort near former Soviet military-testing areas. One of the UXO-contaminated territories inherited by Azerbaijan from the Soviet era is a testing and training base for military forces of the former Soviet Union located in the Jeyranchel area and intensively used from 1955 to 1991. This contaminated area of 64 million square meters (24.71 sq. mi.) poses a serious humanitarian, socioeconomic and environmental threat to the local population.

After relevant negotiations and project preparation, the Jeyranchel Clearance Project was approved in October 2011 as the second NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Fund project in Azerbaijan. The U.S. is the lead nation for the project, and the Azerbaijan Government contributes 50 percent of the total project budget. The first phase of the project, anticipated to begin in the first quarter of 2012, involves clearance of UXO and mines from 19 million square meters (7.34 sq. mi.) over a period of 28 months.<sup>5</sup>

In Azerbaijan, ANAMA works to develop a national MRE capacity; integrate MRE into school curriculums, especially in mine-affected districts; and implement community-based MRE projects. Through 123 MRE training sessions, 2,335 teachers from 1,200 schools have learned techniques for instructing students about landmine dangers since 2004. As a result of this increased national capacity, more than 52,000 secondary school students receive MRE annually. Community-based MRE projects were also very successful at engaging local leaders, who organized awareness-training sessions, community discussions and MRE meetings attended by more than 37,064 residents attended. As a result of its MRE program's success within Azerbaijan, ANAMA has expanded its mission throughout the region and has conducted and supported MRE in Afghanistan, Georgia and Tajikistan.

Within the framework of the Azerbaijan Government's initiative on nonmilitary assistance to Afghanistan, 25,500 MRE textbooks, translated into Dari by Afghan specialists, have been presented to the Afghanistan Department of Mine Clearance.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, ANAMA conducts landmine victim-assistance activities. ANAMA undertook one such project, The Community Based Small Business Trainings and Micro-credit Revolving Fund for Azerbaijan Mine Survivors, funded by the Austrian Development Agency and the governments of Azerbaijan, Korea and Slovenia. Azerbaijan has more than 1,800 mine victims, many of whom suffer social and economic woes from their injuries. At the end of its first phase in November 2009, the program had helped 38 mine victims and 14 widows of victims to secure microcredit loans to begin small businesses.<sup>7</sup> Now in its final phase, which began in May 2011, the microcredit program has provided 88 victims and their families with more than US\$112,686 to finance small business and agricultural investments. In the future, ANAMA hopes to provide these victims and their families with vocational training in computer systems, English-language skills, tailoring and hairdressing.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Future**

ANAMA aims to "promote, plan and implement a safe, effective and efficient national mine action programme in Azerbaijan in order to remove the threat of landmines and explosive devices."<sup>8</sup> The program works to cultivate its capacity for planning, coordinating and managing all mine/UXO-related activities with donor help, including the Government of Azerbaijan, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau

of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), UNDP, the European Commission and the NATO Partnership for Peace fund.<sup>7</sup> With ongoing support, ANAMA hopes to enable Azerbaijani citizens to continue rebuilding their homes, communities and futures through clearance, education and assistance. ↴

~ Jeremiah Smith, CISR staff

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## Endnotes

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