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Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines

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Cluster-munitions Monitoring and Information Campaign in Azerbaijan

This article describes the initiatives undertaken by the Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines to confront the threat of cluster munitions in the country. Since the publication of its report in January of 2008, AzCBL has continued to lobby the government of Azerbaijan to ban the use of cluster munitions.

by Hafiz Safikhonov [Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines]

Azerbaijan is among the 30 countries in the world affected by cluster munitions, still haunted by the legacy of a war that ended over a decade ago. Between 1992 and 1994, armed conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia led to the use of cluster munitions against military and civilian targets in the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Cluster munitions (or cluster bombs) are military weapons used to disperse numerous smaller submunitions over large areas. Due to the high failure rates of submunitions, many do not detonate on impact and pose a serious threat to civilians long after the fighting has ceased. Although there are many unknowns associated with cluster munitions in Azerbaijan, the scope of unexploded-ordnance contamination in Nagorno-Karabakh is massive. A survey conducted by The HALO Trust in 2007 confirmed 162 areas where cluster submunitions have yet to be cleared, while estimating that this number will increase by an additional 150 areas as surveying continues. In 2007 alone, HALO cleared over 6,500 submunitions in Nagorno-Karabakh and faces the daunting task of clearing countless thousands more in the future.

The stark reality of cluster submunition contamination in Azerbaijan is its broad-reaching humanitarian impact. As of 3 April 2007, there were 13 reported casualties in Azerbaijan due to submunitions. One of the most widely disseminated submunitions in Azerbaijan is the ShOAB 0.5, a small, anti-personnel fragmentation explosive. Found in fields, forests

the country as a whole. Even after armed conflict has ended, unexploded cluster-munitions act as a weapon of area-denial against innocent civilians by limiting mobility and negating the use of otherwise productive land for economic subsistence.

Many details regarding the past use of cluster munitions in Azerbaijan remain unknown. The government of Azerbaijan maintains that it did not use cluster bombs during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict despite reports to the contrary, and thereby is unable/ unwilling to provide any empirical data about the quantity and locations of past cluster munitions use. Additionally, as much of the territory around Nagorno-Karabakh remains occupied by the Armenian Armed Forces, many areas that are suspected of being contaminated with UXO remain unavailable for survey. Despite official denials by the Azerbaijan government concerning the existence of cluster munitions in Azerbaijan's territory, recent work by the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action in the area of Saloglu has indicated the exact opposite. The Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines is now in the process of surveying the regions of Fizuli, Terter and Tovuz to gather essential data on the size and scope of the humanitarian impact posed by cluster munitions. It is the goal of AzCBL to eliminate some of the unknowns concerning this dangerous weapon in Azerbaijan and provide a timely, reliable and independent body of data on this subject.



Locations of cluster-munitions contamination.
GRAPHIC COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

munitions. The official line of argument that has been adopted by the government of Azerbaijan is that Azerbaijan, as a stockpiler of cluster munitions, cannot accede to any such treaty banning cluster munitions as long as the prospect of renewed armed conflict with Armenia remains a possibility. It is AzCBL's goal to increase public awareness on the dangers of cluster munitions within Azerbaijan while continuing to press the government to change its stance on signing the *Convention on Cluster Munitions*. It strongly believes that the political and humanitarian benefits of participating in the Oslo Process far outweigh the limited military utility of a weapon that indiscriminately kills civilians and threatens future generations of Azeris.

Regional Workshop on Cluster Munitions

On 23 August 2007, representatives from eight countries in the region met in the Azerbaijan's capital for an International Campaign to Ban Landmines workshop concerning cluster munitions. Campaigners and researchers from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine gathered with representatives from ICBL and the Norwegian Embassy in Baku to raise awareness on the topic and articulate the need to advance the goals of the Oslo Process. In total, 23 orga-

nizations attended the workshop, including representatives from human-rights organizations, war-victims associations, war-veterans groups, fellow anti-landmine campaigns and ANAMA.

The two-day conference in Baku began with a series of presentations and a round-table forum to engage and educate members of Azerbaijan's civil society and AzCBL's local coordinators. Lively discussions and active question periods gave the opportunity to discuss different countries' situations. ANAMA's representatives, however, expressed their opinion that cluster munitions were not a problem in Azerbaijan, were not present in Azerbaijan and had not been used within the territory of Azerbaijan in the past. By the conclusion of the workshop there was promise in pursuing the issue of cluster munitions within the region, and cooperation and education will play an integral role in the advocacy of the Oslo Process despite ANAMA's position.

Field Visits and Monitoring Missions

In September 2007, AzCBL mounted its first data-collection mission in Azerbaijan's rural regions of Fizuli, Terter and Tovuz, meeting with several experts from military backgrounds. Information collected proved extremely promising and has yielded places, dates/times and victim contacts that confirm cluster munitions contamination in the surveyed regions.

The findings of AzCBL's regional monitoring missions and interviews with victims and military experts within the region offer new insight into Azerbaijan's cluster-munitions problem. The resulting data has yielded concrete information for follow up. In total, AzCBL has confirmed nine deaths as a result of cluster munitions and 41 cluster-munitions victims currently living in the surveyed regions.

Locations within Districts of Azerbaijan that have dealt with Cluster-munitions Strikes in the Past

Fizuli District	Aghdam District	Aghdara District
The Town of Fizuli	Khachyn Garvand	Syrkhavand
Yukhary Yaghlivend	Chinli	Manik
Yukhary Dilagharda	Garalar	Vamg
Veysalli		Dovshanly
Gorgan		

Table 1: Specific locations within each district have been identified as areas where cluster-munitions strikes occurred in the past

and urban areas alike, children are easily tempted to pick up and play with this ball-shaped submunition, along with its egg-shaped cousin, the AO 2.5. As a result, the majority of recorded casualties have been children. Cluster submunitions victims require significant medical care and physical, psychological and social rehabilitation. Their injuries result in significant economic losses to the individuals, their families and

AzCBL recognizes that Azerbaijan cannot afford to sit still or remain ignorant on the topic of cluster munitions. Over the past five years, the Convention on Conventional Weapons¹ has failed to address the issue of cluster munitions in any tangible way. Consequently, the Oslo Process was started in February 2007 as a mechanism to formulate an international treaty that bans the production, stockpiling and use of cluster

Meetings for Information Sharing and Lobbying

In addition to its lobbying for a cluster-munitions ban, AzCBL held numerous meetings throughout the year as the primary means of advocacy and information-sharing on the landmine issue. AzCBL also learned about what others were doing in relation to the landmine issue and advocated for the Mine Ban Treaty² by encouraging other parties to act in accordance with its principles and work towards Azerbaijan's accession.³ These activities included meetings with government representatives, foreign embassies, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations and independent experts.

Media Outreach

Press conferences. After completing an extensive schedule of meetings, AzCBL and ICBL held a joint press conference on 28 August 2007. The press conference was designed to disseminate information pertaining to Azerbaijan's cluster-munitions contamination problem and stress the importance of the country's participation in the Oslo Process. The press conference drew a large amount of media attention; journalists from national and regional radio, television, and print media were in attendance.

Distribution of AzCBL information bulletins. The AzCBL produced and distributed an electronic news bulletin in October 2007, covering the course of the project from August up to that point. A second information bulletin was distributed at the end of January 2008. These bulletins carried information about the work and activities of the AzCBL, important incidents or events related to the country's landmine situation, and current mine-related statistics. Bulletins are an important means of promoting the mine-ban movement in Azerbaijan. They are also an excellent tool for promoting coordination and transparency among organizations and structures affected by or working on the landmine issue.³

Distribution of leaflets. AzCBL has created a brochure outlining the nature of the cluster-munitions problem in Azerbaijan, the purpose and activities of the organization in addressing this problem, and

AzCBL took the opportunity to lobby delegates participating in the 8MSP; furthermore, AzCBL took part in ICBL training on information gathering and planning in order to promote the work of the global mine-ban movement and coordinate regional and thematic efforts.

Belgrade Conference of States Affected by Cluster Munitions. AzCBL sent two staff members to participate at the Belgrade Conference of States Affected by Cluster Munitions.⁶ From 2–4 October 2007, delegations from 82 countries gathered for an international conference concerning the problem of cluster munitions in states affected by this weapon.

Delegations from affected states discussed their hopes and concerns regarding the creation of a future treaty banning cluster munitions, while member organizations of the Cluster Munitions Coalition met to strategize and discuss the progress made in their respective campaigns. Although AzCBL considers the conference a success in many ways, the government of Azerbaijan refrained from making a statement of support for the Oslo Process, and its participation in future conferences has not been assured.

Vienna Conference to Ban Cluster Munitions. The Vienna Conference to Ban Cluster Munitions was held 4–7 December 2007.⁷ The conference was a great success, with 138 states deliberating over a future treaty to ban cluster munitions. AzCBL met several times with the government delegation from Azerbaijan to continue its message that in order to rid Azerbaijan once and for all of cluster munitions, it is necessary for the government to commit itself to future participation in the Oslo Process and to accede to the comprehensive ban on cluster munitions.

Project Outcomes

Since the inception of its latest project, AzCBL has made considerable strides toward its goals. Preliminary regional data concerning cluster-munition survivors and contamination has been collected for the Azerbaijan's regions of Fizuli, Terter and Tovuz. Although this information is not comprehensive, the data reveals a major gap between

donors and humanitarian organizations, with limited resources, to engage in cluster-munitions victim assistance more effectively.

In addition, AzCBL should continue to be open and transparent about its activities via regular distribution of information to relevant contacts, including those within the Azerbaijan government. Continued campaigning will be vital to maintaining Azerbaijan's participation in future Oslo Process meetings, with the eventual aim of having Azerbaijan sign a comprehensive ban on cluster munitions.

Finally, the creation of concrete projects for the psychosocial and socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration of cluster-munitions survivors is needed. Many of those contacted throughout the course of this project face the same economic, medical and psychological difficulties that are experienced by Azerbaijan's community of landmine survivors.

Conclusion

This project represents the first major attempt to tackle the problem of cluster munitions in Azerbaijan. The research carried out by AzCBL sheds new light on the situation within the country and has empirically clarified evidence that had previously been either uninvestigated or anecdotal.

It is also encouraging to note that Azerbaijan has taken positive steps toward the Oslo Process by attending meetings in Belgrade, Brussels and Vienna. While these are encouraging steps toward solving the country's cluster-munition problem, many more remain to be taken in order to ensure that these weapons will never again threaten the lives and livelihoods of future generations of Azeri civilians. ♦

See Endnotes, page 112



Hafiz Safikhonov is the Director and one of the original founders of the AzCBL. He has been the head researcher of the Azerbaijan country report for the *Landmine Monitor Report* from 1999 to 2007 and has participated in all annual meetings of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention. Safikhonov is a former military officer from the Fizuli region of Azerbaijan. Since the occupation of Fizuli in 1993, he has been displaced from his home. He also heads the Azerbaijan Committee of the International Humanitarian Movement "Refugees Against Landmines."

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Continued campaigning will be vital to maintaining Azerbaijan's participation in future Oslo Process meetings, with the eventual aim of having Azerbaijan sign a comprehensive ban on cluster munitions.

the need for Azerbaijan's accession to the Oslo Process and the Ottawa Convention. This brochure is distributed to all members of Parliament and governmental representatives with whom the AzCBL interacts, attracting attention, providing basic facts on the issue and lobbying for support. Some materials not disseminated yet and currently in production will continue to be distributed throughout AzCBL's advocacy activities in the coming year.

Landmine Monitor Report 2007. The Azerbaijan country report from the *Landmine Monitor Report 2007*⁴ was published into 300 booklets, including both Azeri and English translations. These booklets have been distributed via AzCBL's meetings, press conferences and roundtable to all relevant contacts.

Participation in International Conferences

8th Meeting of States Parties. AzCBL attended the 8th Meeting of States Parties at the Dead Sea, Jordan,⁵ from 18–22 November 2007. AzCBL joined other ICBL campaigners in calling all countries to respect treaty obligations, keep the ban on anti-personnel landmines a high priority, continue to fulfill mine-clearance commitments and provide real change to address the needs of mine survivors.

the government's stated position of cluster munitions as a non-issue in the country and the reality on the ground. Research and information collection in these regions has led AzCBL to identify 40 cluster-munitions survivors residing in Azerbaijan and confirm nine deaths as a result of their use.

In addition, the government of Azerbaijan has made very positive steps in recent months toward participation in the Oslo Process and in showing its interest in international treaty forums. Two main occurrences are evidence of this progress. First, a representative was sent by ANAMA to participate at the Belgrade Conference of Cluster Munitions Affected States. Second, Azerbaijan's participation at the Vienna Conference to Ban Cluster Munitions was also a clear indication that—having been engaged by AzCBL and other international/nongovernmental organizations on the issue—Azerbaijan was willing to continue its involvement.

Recommendations

Given the information that AzCBL has collected concerning cluster munitions, it proposes a few steps. The first is to create and develop a reliable and comprehensive database of cluster-munitions survivors within Azerbaijan. Having such a database would enable government authorities,

News Brief

Israel Accused of Using Illegal Weapons in Gaza

Human rights groups—notably Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch—have condemned Israel's alleged use of white-phosphorus munitions in Gaza. The organizations have deemed the decision to use these weapons in heavily populated areas as war crimes and *contretemps* to international law. The Israeli military has denied the use of white phosphorus during its military campaign against Hamas in late 2008/early 2009, and has stated that all weapons used in its three-week offensive were accepted and congruent with international law.

White phosphorus is a highly incendiary chemical used in military operations as a smoke screen to cover troop movement in a specific area. The chemical can also be used as an indiscriminate weapon, as the agent causes severe burns when it comes into contact with skin. It is known to cause serious respiratory problems. A shell can hold more than 100 incendiary rounds, which ignite and distribute smoke for around 10 minutes. The intent of using white phosphorus as a weapon, instead of as an obscuring agent, is banned by the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Even though Israel is not a signatory to the Convention, official military manuals for Israeli personnel, which outline the proper conduct in military operations, uphold the restrictions on the use of white phosphorus.