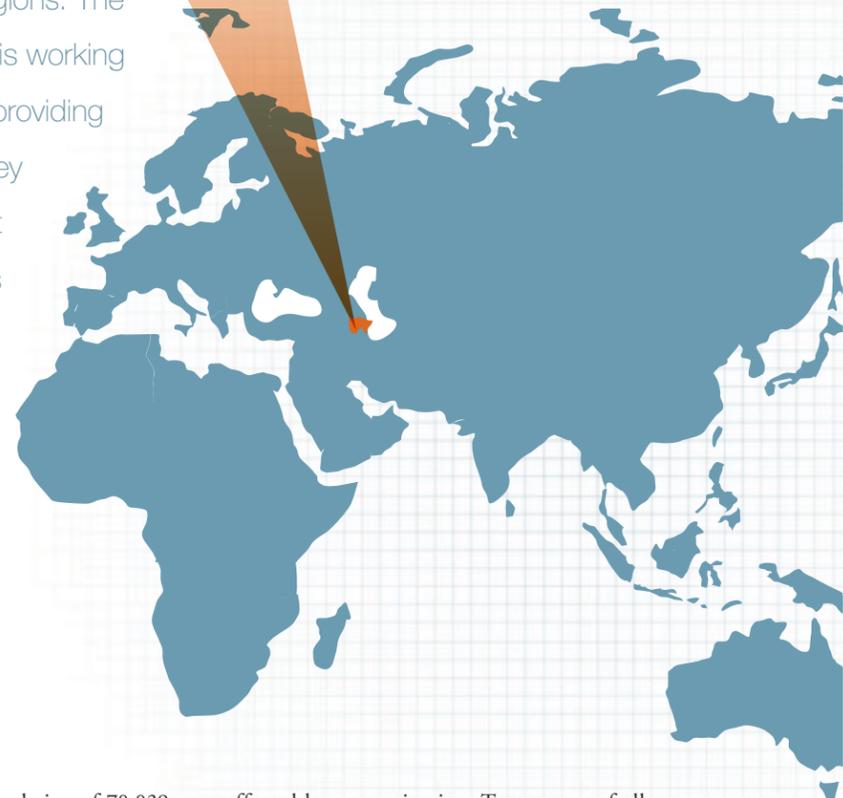


International Eurasia Press Fund Works in Azerbaijan

Problems with explosive remnants of war¹ 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 populace 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 mine and unexploded ordnance areas.

The Terter district of Azerbaijan was deemed highly contaminated—36 square kilometers (14 square miles) of land in 23 villages were thought tainted by mines and UXO. This contamination, remnants of heavy battles, deeply affected the infrastructure and impeded development. Mirzoyev says 36,291 people out of a total local

population of 70,039 were affected by contamination. Ten percent of all Azeri landmine victims lived in the Terter district, he added.²

IEPF Focus Areas

Working with several national and international partners, the IEPF devised a solution to meet the needs of the mine-affected populace and created 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 and Relief Azerbaijan to conduct mine-clearance operations—the IEPF worked predominately in the Terter district with a 38-member demining team and cleared 758,947 square meters (0.29 square mile) of land in 2005.³ The IEPF also conducted 10 MRE sessions in 2005.

Tapping into these efforts and other experiences, the IEPF developed a three-point infrastructure. The organization's focus areas are:

1. Media and civil-society development
2. Peacemaking and conflict actions
3. Refugee/internally displaced person problems and community development

The IEPF has had success in these three fields of activity. **Media and civil-society development.** The IEPF has worked to develop a national environment in which the media is removed from politicization and where coverage can be part of a fair and neutral process. To achieve these goals, the



Baby of mine victim, Bakhtiyar Aliyev, born without fingers
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF IEPF

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 ravages of war on Azerbaijan. Coverage has also been directed at the suffering of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Peacemaking and conflictology actions. Peacemaking actions and other projects in this focus area have been directed at protecting human rights in Azerbaijan. The IEPF has spent a large amount of time analyzing national and military problems with the goal of remediation. The Level One Landmine Survey, Landmine Impact Survey and Mine Victims' Needs Assessment all began as projects implemented through this focus area, ultimately growing to larger endeavors. Several international conferences, seminars and roundtables were also organized or attended.

Refugee/IDP problems and community development. IEPF efforts in this area have included the analysis of migration problems, resolving refugee/IDP problems and assisting 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 employment 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.

Genesis of the MVA

In conjunction with the completion of the Mine Victims' Needs Assessment and their 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.

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 specialties 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.

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.

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 apparatuses. 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 hypodermic, intramuscular and intravenous injections. Information on general hygienic 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 businesses devised were specific to the Terter district. The business plans dealt mostly with grain growing, cattle breeding, poultry raising, beekeeping and carpet weaving. Further collaboration will help to bring these business plans to fruition.

Mine-risk education. General information on the landmine/UXO 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 participating in MRE activities that were focused on safety around mined areas, which taught officials how to inform about a mine threat and how to conduct MRE activities. Participants also joined Working Group leaders in carrying out MRE sessions in villages of the Terter district—Aghkand, Damirchilar, Jamilly, Seydimly, Shikharkh and other villages all received MRE as part of this process.

Computer seminars. Initiative Group members also received training on the operation and use of personal computers, beginning



Mine victims meeting with representatives of the mass media from Yeni Tertar newspaper, Simurg TV, Radio Liberty, AzCBL, ARSC in Terter district.

with information on computer components and continuing with detailed sessions on the use of specific software like Microsoft Windows and Word. They also learned how to perform calculations in Microsoft Excel and other functions in Microsoft Office programs. With this knowledge, group members plan to teach other mine victims. Participants also organized a series of English-language and computer courses for the children of mine victims, conducting 16 lessons in English and 14 lessons in basic computer skills for children in four months.



Mine victims of the Terter branch of the Azerbaijan Mine Victims Association at the computer course.

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 demining organizations. 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 Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action. Meetings with orthopedic 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 political 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 determination of disability, 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 Shirinov—are currently involved with seeding activities and one—Nuru Gouliev—with 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 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

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

Mirzoyev 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 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 prosthetic appliances, Mirzoyev says. "Mine victims have to leave for Baku or Ganja cities, and, of course, they have some difficulties in doing it," he says.³ 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 that easy to solve.

Mirzoyev 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' socio-



Seeding field of mine victim Nizami Bardary in Terter.

economic 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.³

There is also the problem of addressing the needs of mine victims in other regions of the country. Regional branch offices will soon begin 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 Azerbaijan Mine Victims' Association are prepared in Aghstafa, Baku and Fizuli. ❖

See Endnotes, Page



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