

# Explosive Remnants of War and Their Consequences

This article examines the post-conflict situation of Tajikistan, which has not only anti-personnel mines but various kinds of explosive remnants of war. Recently Tajikistan signed Protocol V<sup>1</sup> of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons,<sup>2</sup> which includes a commitment to clear the nation's ERW. The author highlights some of the different sources of ERW in Tajikistan as well as the progress being made by authorities to clear and destroy ERW.

by Jonmahmad Rajabov [ Tajikistan Mine Action Centre ]

**W**orldwide, landmines and unexploded ordnance kill and maim approximately 20,000 people annually, one third of them children.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, the international community has not paid serious attention to the risk posed by the UXO problem (i.e., explosive ordnance that is used during armed conflict but fails to detonate). It is impossible to accurately count the number of uncleared mines and it is also uncertain how much UXO remains. However, it is believed the total number of items of UXO, no matter the type, greatly exceed the total number of mines. UXO and other explosive items such as abandoned ordnance (all grouped together under the term *explosive remnants of war*) continue to appear in huge numbers in previous areas of conflict. Some countries, like Laos and Vietnam, are more affected by UXO than mines.

Nowadays the international community is paying more serious attention to the risks posed by the UXO problem. This is reaffirmed by the adoption of Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. The adoption of Protocol V on 28 November 2003 was possible thanks to governments acknowledging the seriousness of the post-conflict problems posed by UXO as well as the necessity to minimize the risk and impact of UXO. Tajikistan ratified Protocol V on 20 December 2005, and the Protocol entered into force for all parties on 12 November 2006. In accordance with the Protocol, the term ERW encompasses UXO and abandoned explosive ordnance in conflict areas. This Protocol obliges the conflicting parties, as well as States Parties, to be responsible

with regard to all UXO under their control. Tajikistan also has a landmine problem and has ratified the Ottawa Convention.<sup>4</sup> Together, these two documents stipulate that after active military fighting ceases, countries should mark and clear the mines as well as liquidate and destroy all mines and UXO under their control.

## Impact of ERW in Tajikistan

In addition to the landmine problem, items of UXO also pose a great challenge in Tajikistan. It is presumed that most ERW remains in the country due to the civil war (1992–1997). The UXO in Tajikistan that remains on the ground is the result of being fired from military planes and helicopters, as well as shelling. A large number of Tajik citizens have consequently died or been seriously injured.

It is necessary to note that items of UXO also appear in the country for reasons unrelated to war, including armed violence and attempted revolts. In Tajikistan, as in many other countries, mandatory military service requires continued and regular military training for the Armed Forces. It has been the case in Tajikistan that during training, some shells have been fired and accidentally landed outside the military training zone. These shells remain unexploded in areas where access to the public remains open, putting the local population at risk.

Since the implementation of the Tajikistan Mine Action Programme, the manual mine-clearance teams and survey teams have found and destroyed more than 700 pieces of UXO. A majority of the ERW were found in the central region of the country where fighting took place during the civil war. Until the ERW are removed from these areas, they will continue to pose a great risk to the population.

In Tajikistan, despite the ERW problem, civilians go about their daily business and continue to find themselves in dangerous areas, at times receiving injuries. For example, in February 2006, two teenagers—brother N. Yorov, 15, and sister M. Yorova, 16, from Besimas village in Hissor district—were injured by a UXO explosion while cutting wood. N. Yorov's leg was seriously injured and his sister received injuries to her stomach. Due to the lack of financial means, the family was unable to provide necessary medical care for the teenagers, which has greatly hampered their recovery. An investigation into the cause of this explosion revealed



A group of houses in close proximity to a mine danger zone.  
ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CLEAR PATH INTERNATIONAL

» In March 1993, two brothers—Bahridin and Nuriddin Eshonov, ages 18 and 17—found a piece of ERW and began to open it. This action resulted in an explosion and the brothers were both killed.

» On 23 July 1993, 11-year-old Khusrav Rafiyev found an item of UXO and tried to burn it. The resulting explosion blinded the boy.

» On 23 April 2005 two brothers—Salim and Mahmatali Saimuddinov, ages 8 and 9—and 5-year-old Fathiddin Ilhomiddinov from the village of Khost found a piece of UXO while they were gathering wood. They began to cut it with an axe which resulted in an explosion and all three of the boys were seriously injured.

that the piece of UXO had been just beyond the limits of a local military training area. No other source of UXO contamination was identified in this case.

A similar accident happened to Z. Urazov, 15, an inhabitant of Rudaki district. Having found a piece of UXO while tending animals in the community grazing area, he lost his right hand and eye as a result of the explosion.

Additional examples of incidents involving ERW are noted in the brief stories at the top of the page. These are clear indications of continuous suffering in the Rasht and Tavildara areas where ordnance was fired from aircraft during the civil war.

### Collection and Demolition of ERW

Tajikistan, as State Party to both the Ottawa Convention and Protocol V of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, takes all the necessary measures to find and demolish mines and ERW.

On 2 December 1994, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan issued the *Decree on Voluntary Surrender and Recapturing of Fire Arms and Military Ammunitions from the Population*. This decree became an instrument for disarming illegal armed groups and recapturing firearms that remained in the hands of the civilian population. Table 1 shows the number of firearms returned from 1994 to 2006.

Kalashnikov gun	9,101
Pistol	2,846
Rifle	3,970
Other types of guns	1,042
Hunting gun/ERW	9,906
<b>Total</b>	<b>26,865</b>

Table 1: Firearms returned between 1994 and 2006.



Two children walking along a dusty road.

In accordance with the agreement between the government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe dated 16 May 2005 and within the framework of the Programme of Small Arms and Light Weapons, an Explosive Demolition Centre was established within the Ministry of Defence. Its major objective is to facilitate the demolition of ERW. More than 70 metric tons (77 tons) of ERW have been demolished as of 19 October 2006, and the work is ongoing.

### Conclusion

Taking the serious consequences of ERW into consideration, it is necessary to point out that the adoption of Protocol V by the international community and its entry into force has great importance for the safety of civilians. Of course, it significantly depends on the process of accession of the governments and the fulfilment of its

provisions by State Parties. TMAC hopes the implementation of Protocol V allows all parties to take practical measures to demolish ERW efficiently and productively to provide safety for all. ♦

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