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Mine Victim Assistance as a Part of Strengthening the Health Sector in Azerbaijan

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Mine Victim Assistance: Strengthening the Health Sector in Azerbaijan

In July 1998, following consultation with its UN partners, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), acting in its capacity as a focal point for all mine-related activities within the UN system, offered to field a multidisciplinary inter-agency mission to assess the requirement for further UN assistance in Azerbaijan. The mission found a serious dearth of recorded data concerning mine/UXO casualties. Even agencies dealing directly with mine victims, such as hospitals and prosthetic centers, have no mechanism to disaggregate data on mine/UXO victims from other war-related injuries.

Another approach of possible approaches to solve the mine/UXO contamination problem was conducted in early 2001 by Mrs. Tehnaz Dastoor, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Landmine Coordinator for the Northern Caucasus. The assessment discovered the necessity of addressing the potential needs of mine victims in Azerbaijan. An integrated and comprehensive assistance program cannot be set up for the mine victims of Azerbaijan until a needs assessment is carried out. The assessment must address more than prosthetic needs. It must address the social and economic needs of not only the limbless but also of the hearing, sight and mentally impaired.

The assessment also revealed that inadequate psychological trauma counseling and vocational training services were being provided for war victims. In both areas (provided an agreement is reached through the Working Group on Mine Victim Assistance and donor funding), intervention would be extremely cost-efficient with high-impact results. It is important to include psychological trauma counseling in any comprehensive mine/UXO programs.

The assessment recommended developing a capacity-building program to address the need for a non-disease-oriented approach to psychological intervention. It was also concluded that vocational training should be included as part of the comprehensive approach to dealing with mine victims.

The assessment was completed to determine the needs of mine victims. In the beginning stages of activities, an inter-agency survey was conducted in about 90 national organizations to identify those conducting MVA or involved in implementation of disabled care projects. Related ministries have been visited and, in consultation with Mrs. Annalisa Seren (UNDP/ANAMA CTA), Tehnaz Dastoor (international specialist, UNICEF), and Ms. Aklar Bala (UNMAS), the following facts have been identified:

- No national long-term MVA plan.
- No MVA projects/programs yet implemented in Azerbaijan.
- No liaison between relevant information sources.
- Little-to-no information and no documentary reports regarding needs of survivors.
- No unified and reliable database on MVA in Azerbaijan, which must be analyzed to serve as a base for any type of forthcoming MVA program eligible for donor funding.

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The strategic objective, the Needs Assessment Project, has been developed to assess needs of disabled people, with a focus on mine victims. After this information is gathered, a plan should be set up. The solution proposed should consist of the following steps:

1. Gather information from United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the government of Azerbaijan (GOM) databases on in-districts, registered about 1,200 landmine/UXO victims. It is believed that the number of mine victims is much higher as most of the victims are living in other parts of Azerbaijan not yet surveyed.

A total of 52 recent mine victims were reported in 2001 and 2002. Detailed information on mine victims is maintained in IMSMA. The existing IMSMA questionnaire, together with data gathered on casualties, makes it possible to gather information about mine incidents (conditions and locations, type of explosive devices, type of injury etc.), which is verified by survivors. Despite this methodology, there is a lack of information regarding the needs of survivors in the questionnaires.

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with the aim of creating a united and reliable database on mine victims in Azerbaijan.

- Identify and maintain an MVA strategy based on needs and develop a long-term national programs.
- Catalyze and coordinate development and implementation of MVA projects and programs.
- Establish and run a special public fund to raise money for financing MVA projects and programs.
- Initiate an information network for disabled people in Azerbaijan, including individuals and associations.
- Identify possible vocational areas for disabled people in different districts in order to create occupational (professional) rehabilitation centers for mine victims and to coordinate their activities.
- Spread information on MVA activities to the public and attract donors.

The last meeting of the Working Group was held in ANAMA’s office on May 7, 2003. Participants were informed that the project proposal “Azerbaijan Countrywide Mine Victim Survey” had been finalized and presented to donors. The representatives of WHO and Association Design of Invalids of Azerbaijan Republic (ADIAR) proposed some activities to be undertaken by ANAMA, was established for detailed and concentrated on the problems in these areas. The initiative group, consisting of ADIAR, Dirchelish (Revival), the Democratic Journalists’ League, WHO and ANAMA, was established for detailed study of particular problems.

The participants decided to continue discussions on establishing and maintaining special public funds on victim assistance, after detailed study of relevant regulations and development of the charter. Everybody agreed that the participation of outstanding people and leading businessman of Azerbaijan could ensure community respect for the fund. It was decided to compile the Group Work Plan taking into account organizations’ propositions and capacities in preferable activity areas.

The Azerbaijan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL) informed the meeting of its project on mine victim data collection in over 10 districts of Azerbaijan, approved by the Slovenian-based International Trust Fund for Demining and MVA. The implementation of the project will start soon. The activity of the NGO “Sheedi Elle” (Healing Hands) from Isnayili town, involving MVA, created deep interest among participants. The organization is assisting 36 mine survivors from Fuzuli and Beylagan districts. There was also discussion on the possibility of gathering data on mine victim needs during the implementation of the ADIAR organization’s program for Fuzuli and Goygoboy districts from May to July.

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ANAMA has been chosen as a focal point for distributing printed materials and information dedicated to assisting disabled people in Azerbaijan. All information will be forwarded to members of the Working Group through the Agency. The ANAMA website (www.anama.baku.az) is considered an effective means of information exchange. Along with the electronic means of information exchange, it also proposed distributing a bi-monthly bulletin on the Working Group. The study of international experience is also considered important. Therefore, ANAMA has started making contact with organizations listed in the Global Mine Action Register on James Madison University’s Mine Action Information Center (MAIC) website (http://maic.jmu.edu/gmap).

The Democratic Journalists’ League, which presented at the meeting for the first time, proposed establishing a “hotline” for preliminary mine victim data collection. ADIAR announced that it proposed an Information and Consultancy Center, operational for years, could also be used for this purpose. The use of this “hotline,” along with official avenues of information, could serve in developing contacts or networking mine survivors. It was also noted that regular publication of articles on mine action, MRE and MVA will canalize the public opinion and the capacities of society in resolving the problems in these areas. The initiative group, consisting of ADIAR, Dirchelish (Revival), the Democratic Journalists’ League, WHO and ANAMA, was established for detailed study of particular problems.

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**Mine Action in Bosnia’s Special District**

No, no, don’t look at the sky. They cannot do you any harm from above anymore. Lower your head because the danger is in your mother earth.

If you have survived the war, try to survive the peace.

- Melisa Drzavoci, schoolgirl, Bosnia and Herzegovina

by Matthew Bolton, Counterpart International

**The Brcko District**

The Brcko Municipalite, located in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, was a fierce battleground during the war from 1992 to 1995. Because of the Brcko District’s unique, strategic and symbolic significance to all sides of the conflict, it was the only issue left unresolved by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), and the common people, and many types of unexploded ordnance (UXO) will take an unacceptable toll on innocent victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Frighteningly, only about 60 percent of mined areas have been identified.

- Melisa Drzavoci, schoolgirl, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Brcko District Government, established on March 8, 2000, is directly accountable to a continuing international supervisory regime, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), and the common institutions, laws and constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but all powers delegated to the entities are “exercised exclusively by the District government.”

- The Landmine/UXO Situation in the Brcko District

Despite the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, the legacy of that conflict continues to cripple the country in real and tangible ways. One of the most obvious is the contamination of enormous amounts of land, up to 4,000 square kilometers in all, by anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Said the U.S. Department of State (OSA), “The effect of residual landmines as a result of heavy mining during the conflict on Bosnia and Herzegovina post-war recovery has been staggering.”

According to the United Nations, writing at the end of December 2001:

- “Up to one million mines, mostly anti-personnel, and many types of unexploded ordnance (UXO) will take an unacceptable toll on innocent victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina.”
- “Frighteningly, only about 60 percent of mined areas have been identified.”

- “More landmines in the country are concentrated on the Zone of Separation (ZOS), the four-lm wide demilitarized zone along the former frontline”, and down the lines, and in the common institutions, laws and constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but all powers delegated to the entities are “exercised exclusively by the District government.”

- Only 60 percent of mined areas in the Brcko region have been identified.

- The Brhoc District

The new Brcko District Government, established on March 8, 2000, is directly accountable to a continuing international supervisory regime, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), and the common institutions, laws and constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but all powers delegated to the entities are “exercised exclusively by the District government.”

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