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## Saloglu Project: Process Launched

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## Saloglu Project: Process Launched

**On April 28, 2003, at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Headquarters in Brussels, the presentation of a project on clearance and destruction of pieces of UXO on the territory of a former Soviet military warehouse near Saloglu village in Azerbaijan took place. The presentation was part of the Regular Meeting of Political Military Steering Committee of NATO's Partnership for Peace (Pfp) Program. The project has been approved and the "green light" has been given for the fundraising process and subsequent implementation of the Saloglu Project to begin.**

by Shirin Rzayeva, ANAMA

### Background

The military ammunition warehouse located in the Agstafa region, consisting of 138 bunkers, was the largest Soviet warehouse in the Caucasus region. In 1991, as a result of an explosion, thousands of pieces of UXO were spread over a large area surrounding the warehouse. To date, 87 people have been injured and 28 of them killed in UXO incidents. Just a couple months ago, another incident took place on the territory of the warehouse. On May 3, 2003, a 28-year old inhabitant of Dag Kesaman village was killed as a result of a UXO explosion. The incident occurred despite the fact that just two weeks before the incident, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) conducted mine risk education and reviewed rules of safe behavior in this area. In addition, since January 2003, ANAMA's limited team of U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)-trained UXO clearance personnel has been deployed to the Saloglu region. During its operations, the clearance team found 619 various types of UXO in a 1.3 million-sq-m area immediately outside the former warehouse.

The warehouse and adjoining area with remaining ammunitions pose a great threat to the population of Agstafa and adjacent districts. But the threat goes beyond just the immediate area around the warehouse. The latest incident happened on June 2, 2003, in the yard of a former scrap metal shop in Boyukshor township of Baku city, where pieces of UXO brought from the ammunition warehouse near Saloglu village had been welded for delivery to a steel company. While being welded, ammunition exploded and two male refugees handling UXO, both 35 years-old, died. Unfortunately, many pieces of UXO still remain.

### Initiation of Saloglu Project

The UXO threat coming from the former warehouse and surrounding territory became widely known in 2001, during the survey on identification of minefields and battle areas. ANAMA decided to address the problem, and in December 2001, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) informed the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA), which deals with ammunition utilization operations in some countries,

about the UXO problems in near the Saloglu village. Due to the active initiative of the MFA and the Mission of the Azerbaijan Republic to NATO, the efforts to involve NAMSA were successful.

During a meeting in July 2002, Turkey was assigned to be the leading nation on the UXO issue in Azerbaijan; yet, in October 2002, representatives from NAMSA visited Saloglu village and provided a preliminary evaluation of the situation. In January 2003, representatives from NATO, the government of Turkey and NAMSA visited Azerbaijan again to conduct a thorough assessment of the area. Along with the information previously gathered by ANAMA specialists, the immediate work on the Saloglu Project was initiated.

On June 25, 2003, in Baku ISR Plaza Hotel, the MFA and ANAMA organized the Donors' Conference, dedicated to the Saloglu Project, to solve the problem of the UXO-contaminated Agstafa district of Azerbaijan. The Donors' Conference was chaired by Mr. Abid Sharifov, the Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan. In his opening speech on behalf of the government of Azerbaijan, he thanked all the representatives of embassies and international organizations for their participation at the meeting. He also briefed the audience about the history of the problem and invited the governments and organizations represented to join the efforts of the government of Azerbaijan and provide funding to resolve the Saloglu problem. Mr. Marco Borsotti, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative in Azerbaijan, also invited all the participants to address the problem with due attention and recognized ANAMA's achievements to date—indicating the capability of the agency to implement the project. Mr. Unal Cheviko, the Ambassador of Turkey, a lead nation in the Saloglu Project, spoke in detail about the ways that Turkey envisions the solution to the problem. Mr. Nazim Ismaylov, Director of ANAMA, discussed the agency's objectives to be addressed in the process of implementation of the project. Lastly, Mr. Araz Azimov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs thanked all the ambassadors and representatives of international and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for their participation at the Donors' Conference and detailed the mechanism of fundraising and project implementation within NATO's PFP Program.

Active discussions took place at the end of the presentation made by ANAMA on the UXO problem itself, as well as Saloglu Project details. Particularly, Ms. Chantal Poiret, the Ambassador of France to Azerbaijan, stated that France, being a member of the European Commission (EC), had already joined mine action in Azerbaijan. The EC provided funding for the implementation of Landmine Socio-Economic Impact Survey in Azerbaijan. Mr. Andrew Tucker, the UK Ambassador to Azerbaijan touched upon major aspects, which in his opinion should guarantee success of the Saloglu Project. The first aspect he mentioned was the concern and interest that the government of Azerbaijan demonstrates in resolving this problem. Secondly, he mentioned the existence of national mine action management capacity in Azerbaijan, ANAMA, which is another important aspect of completing the Saloglu Project successfully.

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