Azerbaijan

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Azerbaijan

by Kateland Shane | Mine Action Information Center

From 1988 to 1994, Azerbaijan was engaged in an armed conflict with its neighbor, Armenia, over armed forces of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. A ceasefire was negotiated in 1994, but a peace agreement was only signed in 1995. Forces from both Armenia and the self-declared Nagorno-Karabakh Republic occupy about 20 percent of land within Azerbaijan, making demining difficult in those areas.

The Landmine/UXO Threat

The 2002-2005 Azerbaijan Landmine Impact Survey conducted in accessible areas identified an extensive mine and unexploded ordnance problem with a reported 970 suspected sites of heavy contamination and 10,000 suspected areas of light contamination along the ceasefire line and the border of Armenia. The survey recognized a total of 18 affected districts. The extent of the threat in the occupied territories is known, although the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action estimates the amount of contaminated land could be anywhere between 350 and 850 square kilometers (135 to 320 miles). The types of mines found in Azerbaijan include not only anti-personnel and anti-tank mines but also homemade mines and field-charges.

In addition to mines, remains from the abandoned Soviet depots and stockpiles are scattered across the country. One of the most serious contaminations involves a massive Soviet nitrogen fertilizer factory, which was destroyed in the Agafa region that resulted in the contamination of 44 square kilometers (17 square miles). Following its destruction, it has become of significance to the ICRC that 152 UXO-related accidents reported in Agafa, mostly in the Saloglu region, where the explosion took place.

Although the exact number of mine/UXO casualties in Azerbaijan are not known, there are believed to over 3,000 victims. Of the victims, over 200 were children and 1,900 are believed to have died. In 2005, mine/UXO casualties were at a 10-year high in Azerbaijan.3

The Ottoman Process

While the Republic of Armenia continues to recognize the events of the Ottoman Republic until the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has been resolved, it has shown support for many terms of the Convention.4 Azerbaijan states that it is already satisfying some conditions of the Convention because it does not produce or transfer anti-personnel mines and it actively cooperates in mine-risk-mitigation and mine-victim-assistance activities. Azerbaijan also is not party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). A special report on the 2006 Red Cross Society of Azerbaijan helped create 10 safe play areas for children in several local communities with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross in addition to the 15 safe play areas that were created in 2005. In 2007 ICRC reports plans to implement safe play areas in 10 more communities throughout Azerbaijan.

From 22 to 23 February, Azerbaijan was one of 43 nations to participate in a workshop on the NATO Partnership for Peace Trust Funds held in Brussels, Belgium. Participants in the workshop received information and training on carrying out Trust Fund activities.

Victim Assistance

In 2006 there were several mine-victim-assistance projects implemented in Azerbaijan. One of the projects being implemented by the IEPE is the support of the U.S. State Department involves the socioeconomic reintegration of local survivors. An initiative group of 10 survivors received training in management, medicine, small business, mine-risk education and computer literacy. An additional 20 mine survivors also volunteered to help with the project, which ended in May 2007. In 2007, with the financial support of the U.S. DOS, the IEPE plans to establish other branches of the Association and ensure their sustainability.5 Following a 2005 needs assessment survey, ANAMA and other NGOs also organized several recent MVA projects in Azerbaijan.6

Conclusion

With the existence of such an organized and dedicated mine-action program, the mine and UXO threat in Azerbaijan is slowly decreasing. ANAMA and other organizations are helping to make Azerbaijan safer for the children. In 2007, with the financial support of the U.S. DOS, the IEPE plans to establish other branches of the Association and ensure their sustainability.6

Kateland Shane has worked as an Editorial Assistant for the Journal of Mine Action since May 2006. She graduated in May 2007 with a bachelor’s degree in technical communication at James Madison University. She plans to return to graduate school.

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