

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Nagorno-Karabakh should make a commitment to respect the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and set a deadline for the clearance all anti-personnel mines.
- Despite not being a state party to the APMBC, Nagorno-Karabakh has obligations under international human rights law to clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should commit to never use anti-personnel mines and provide resources for mine survey and clearance.
- Information management should be improved as inaccuracies in reported anti-personnel mine contamination, survey, and clearance data continue to occur.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

At the end of 2018, anti-personnel mine contamination throughout the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh, including both within the Soviet-era boundaries and in the adjacent territories, was estimated to cover just over 3.78km² across 70 mined areas (see Table 1).¹ Since 2017, the number of confirmed hazardous area (CHAs) has decreased (from 73 to 70), while total mined area has increased (from 3.56km² to 3.78km²).² The difference in total mine contamination between the end of 2017 and end of 2018 cannot be explained or reconciled by the total area released during the intervening 12 months. Anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mine contamination covered a total of 82 areas over 5.1km² as at the end of 2018.³

Table 1: Anti-personnel mined area by province (at end 2018)⁴

Region	CHAs	Area (km ²)
Askeran	7	0.33
Hadrut	20	1.90
Lachin	19	0.67
Martakert	18	0.54
Martuni	2	0.17
Shaumyan	4	0.17
Totals	70	3.78

The HALO Trust is currently conducting survey with a view to more accurately quantifying the mined area in Nagorno-Karabakh, covering areas that had not been surveyed in the past. In 2019, The HALO Trust doubled its survey capacity in order to try and complete the survey by the end of the year. In 2018, three CHAs were added to the database with an estimated area of 62,567m².⁵

All regions of Nagorno-Karabakh have been affected by mines and unexploded submunitions as a result of the 1988–94 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and subsequent fighting. Mines were laid by both the Azeri and pro-Karabakh forces during the war, with a relatively high proportion of anti-vehicle mines being used in some regions.⁶ The mines were of Soviet design and manufacture, and due to the nature of the conflict certain areas were mined several times.⁷ In 2013, new anti-personnel mines were laid along the Armenian-Azerbaijani "line of contact" east and north of the disputed territory. At the time the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nagorno-Karabakh stated that "due to the ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan ... today we are not in a position to refrain from using AP [anti-personnel] mines for defensive purposes along the line of contact." He noted further that, "these mines are neither aimed at the civilian population nor at the extermination of the adversary but for limiting its advances and ceasing any possible military aggression against us."⁸

Nagorno-Karabakh is also contaminated with submunitions, estimated at 71.62km² at the end of 2018, and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) (see Mine Action Review's *Clearing Cluster Munition Remnants 2019* report on Nagorno-Karabakh for further information).

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

In 2000, The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMAC), which is now moribund. In theory, its role was to consolidate all mine action-related information and to respond to requests from the government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities. In reality, there is no viable or tangible mine action centre in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁹

A mine action coordination committee was responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust.¹⁰

Regular coordination committee meetings were held between the local authorities, The HALO Trust, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) until 2018 when the head of the committee was moved to a new post. The position remains vacant, with HALO Trust continuing to lobby for a suitable candidate to fill the role.¹¹

The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities do not provide The HALO Trust with any funding to clear mined areas.¹²

GENDER

The HALO Trust has an organisational gender and diversity policy which is incorporated into HALO's Nagorno-Karabakh programme. In addition to fully briefing new recruits, HALO also conducts regular refresher training on all its policies, including its gender and diversity policy, for both national and international staff.¹³

All groups affected by anti-personnel mines, including women and children are said to be consulted during survey and community liaison activities. However, the non-technical survey teams have been predominantly male with the first female team member only recruited in 2019. The HALO trust aims to recruit more female non-technical survey team members.¹⁴

Relevant mine action data is disaggregated by sex and age.¹⁵ Gender is not taken into account in the prioritisation, planning, and tasking of survey and clearance activities.¹⁶

The HALO Trust is one of the largest civilian employers in Nagorno-Karabakh, with 270 Karabakhi Armenian staff.¹⁷ And while there is equal access to employment for qualified women and men in survey and clearance, the number of women employed in operational roles is still quite low. In 2018, out of the total of 210 deminers only 15 were women of whom 2 were team leaders. In addition, three women were employed in managerial level/supervisory positions, and six of the support staff were women.¹⁸

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

There is no national information management system in place. However, The HALO Trust operates its own country mine action database and is working to better tailor the database to its operations. For example, new fields were added to the database in 2018 to allow for further disaggregation of data. HALO Nagorno-Karabakh also continues to be supported by its United Kingdom-based specialist data management staff.¹⁹

The Nagorno-Karabakh Army Liaison Officer shares information with HALO Trust on items found, incidents, CHAs, and clearance on a regular basis. HALO is not authorised to share this data with others.²⁰

PLANNING AND TASKING

There is no national mine action strategy currently in place in Nagorno-Karabakh.²¹

The HALO Trust prioritised clearance of minefields in Nagorno-Karabakh that have confirmed accidents and which will be used immediately following clearance. In 2018, most mined areas remaining were only accessible during

the dry summer months of May to October, and HALO Trust expanded its clearance capacity over this period. Clearance outside of the Traditional Oblast was focused on high- and medium-priority tasks in the Lachin corridor, with private funding; with clearance of the remaining minefields within the Traditional Oblast boundary conducted using USAID funding. This approach continued into 2019.²²

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

No local mine action standards exist in Nagorno-Karabakh. As at April 2019, however, the Nagorno-Karabakh police were planning to lobby the government to develop standards and The HALO Trust was planning to work closely with the authorities to support the process.²³

The HALO Trust follows its own standing operating procedures (SoPs) for demining and battle area clearance.²⁴ As at April 2019, HALO's survey and anti-personnel mine clearance SoPs were under review, with a view to incorporating best practice from other HALO country programmes.²⁵

OPERATORS

Since 2000, The HALO Trust has been the main organisation conducting land release in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Nagorno-Karabakh Rescue Service conducts explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) spot tasks and one Nagorno-Karabakh army unit conducts limited demining. Since the April 2016 conflict, The HALO Trust has collaborated with the Nagorno-Karabakh Rescue Services when gathering information about mines and other ERW, and part of its quality assurance (QA) process involves participation in the official handover ceremony with community representatives.²⁶

The HALO Trust does not field separate teams dedicated solely to either mine or ERW clearance. Operational staff are trained and experienced in working in both tasks.²⁷ HALO is currently working to increase its non-technical survey capacity in support of its mine clearance operations, while decreasing its technical survey capacity. HALO recruited 30 new deminers in 2018. It had hoped to recruit more but a demining accident in March 2018 (see below) is thought to have deterred many potential applicants.²⁸

OPERATIONAL TOOLS

HALO conducts both manual and mechanical clearance in Nagorno-Karabakh. Machines are used to clear roads with a plastic anti-vehicle mine threat and in areas with high levels of metal contamination which makes manual clearance extremely inefficient.²⁹

DEMINER SAFETY

In March 2018, a HALO vehicle with a technical survey team on board detonated an anti-vehicle mine on their way to an anti-personnel mine clearance task, killing three staff and injuring two others.

The accident was internally investigated by The HALO Trust, which also commissioned an external expert investigation. A further investigation by the Nagorno-Karabakh police

was ongoing as at 1 May 2019. As a result of the internal investigation prodding was halted as a safety precaution until the exact causes of the accident were understood. Mechanical clearance and clearance with detectors have since superseded its use. Copies of HALO Trust's internal and external reports will be available once the police investigation is finalised.³⁰

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2018

A total of almost 0.26km² of mined area was released in 2018, of which 0.25km² was cleared, and 3,148m² was reduced through technical survey.

In addition, three CHAs were added to the database with an estimated area of 62,567m².³¹

SURVEY IN 2018

No anti-personnel mined area was cancelled through non-technical survey in 2018 but a total of 3.148m² was reduced through technical survey (see Table 2).³² This is a massive reduction from the 0.29km² of mined area cancelled through non-technical survey and 0.27km² reduced through technical survey in 2017.³³

CLEARANCE IN 2018

In 2018, a total of 253,804m² was cleared across 26 areas with 96 anti-personnel mines and 40 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) destroyed (see Table 3).³⁴ This is a drop from the 292,176m² cleared in 2017 and 188 anti-personnel mines found and destroyed.³⁵ In 2017, The HALO Trust found one mine for every 1,974m² of land cleared while in 2018 it was one mine for every 2,644m² cleared.

Table 2: Reduction of mined area through technical survey in 2018³⁶

Province	Area reduced (m ²)
Askeran	1,429
Hadrut	376
Lachin	1,136
Martuni	207
Total	3,148

Table 3: Mine clearance in 2018³⁷

Province	Areas cleared	Area cleared (m ²)	AP mines destroyed	AV mines destroyed	UXO destroyed
Askeran	2	8,849	3	0	4
Hadrut	9	116,306	23	0	13
Lachin	6	48,599	27	0	14
Martakert	7	69,398	43	0	8
Martuni	2	10,652	0	0	1
Totals	26	253,804	96	0	40

In addition, the HALO Trust destroyed 27 anti-personnel mines during 13 EOD spot tasks in 2018.³⁸

Progress in mine clearance has fluctuated over the last five years, as shown in Table 4, but with clearance output averaging below 0.5km² annually. As at 2014, 95% of mine contamination in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh had been addressed, and this figure had risen to 97% by April 2017.³⁹ Following a commitment from the United States to fund the completion of clearance of all known remaining minefields within Soviet-era boundaries, the HALO Trust had previously reported that this could be achieved by the end of 2019.⁴⁰ However, in April 2019, the HALO Trust stated that it does not anticipate clearing the minefields within the Soviet-era boundaries by the end of 2019 or in the foreseeable future. The HALO Trust had based the original completion date on a rate of clearance it is no longer able to achieve due to difficulties in access, challenging terrain, high levels of contamination which in some cases can only be cleared using full excavation, and difficulties with staff recruitment and retention as a result of the March 2018 accident.⁴¹

In addition, there is significant mine contamination outside of the Soviet-era boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh but the HALO Trust finds it difficult to secure funding for these areas. Since 2015, clearance has been conducted through private sources of funding.⁴²

Table 4: Five-year summary of mine clearance (2014–18)

Year	Area cleared (km ²)*
2018	0.25
2017	0.29
2016	0.12
2015	0.21
2014	0.54
Total	1.41

* Figures for clearance in 2014–17 include both anti-vehicle and anti-personnel mines.

1 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, Program Manager, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

2 Email from Amasia Zargarian, Programme Support Officer, HALO Trust, 21 September 2018.

3 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

4 Ibid. The difference between reported contamination in 2017 and 2018 (+0.22km²) is more than the amount of land that was confirmed as contaminated also taking into account the land that was released (0.06 - 0.26km²).

5 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

6 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 2.

7 HALO Trust, "Our role in Nagorno-Karabakh: History", accessed 20 July 2019 at: bit.ly/2Zyu1KZ.

8 ICBL, "ICBL gravely concerned about use of anti-personnel mines by Nagorno-Karabakh", Geneva, 20 September 2013, at: bit.ly/2YHgCmr.

9 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.

10 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013.

11 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.

12 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 The HALO Trust, "Our role in Nagorno-Karabakh", accessed 10 April 2019.

18 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.

24 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016.

25 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

26 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.

27 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 22 May 2015.

28 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

29 Ibid.

30 Emails from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 and 26 April and 1 June 2019.

31 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

32 Ibid.

33 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.

34 Ibid.

35 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.

36 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

37 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

38 Ibid.

39 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.

40 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 31 August 2018.

41 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.

42 Ibid.