

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

| | 2017 | 2016 |
|--|------------|------------|
| Problem understood | 6 | 6 |
| Target date for completion of mine clearance | 6 | 6 |
| Targeted clearance | 6 | 6 |
| Efficient clearance | 6 | 6 |
| National funding of programme | 2 | 2 |
| Timely clearance | 5 | 5 |
| Land-release system in place | 7 | 7 |
| National mine action standards | 7 | 7 |
| Reporting on progress | 5 | 6 |
| Improving performance | 5 | 5 |
| PERFORMANCE SCORE: AVERAGE | 5.5 | 5.6 |

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

There was a small increase in the amount of land released by survey and clearance in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2017, however, there were some discrepancies in the reported contamination and clearance data. Progress towards completion in Nagorno-Karabakh is impacted by the fact that bilateral funding is typically restricted to within the traditional Soviet-era boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh, which represent 18% of the overall

mined area still to be cleared. The remaining 82% of mine contamination is in “green areas”, between the traditional Soviet boundary of the autonomous oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, the militarised line of contact with Azerbaijan, and other international borders, for which it is more difficult to secure international funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should commit to never use anti-personnel mines and provide resources for mine survey and clearance.
- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should make a commitment to respect the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and set a deadline for the clearance all anti-personnel mines.
- Nagorno-Karabakh should report more accurately on the extent of contamination and progress in survey and clearance in a manner that is consistent with the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

CONTAMINATION

In 1988, a decision by the parliament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province to secede from Azerbaijan and join Armenia resulted in armed conflict in 1988–94 between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh declared independence in 1991, but this has not been internationally recognised.

All regions of Nagorno-Karabakh have been affected by mines and submunitions as a result of the 1988–94 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. 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, as well as anti-personnel mines throughout.¹ The mines were of Soviet design and manufacture, and due to the nature of the conflict certain areas were mined several times.²

New contamination was added in 2013. In July 2013, Nagorno-Karabakh’s military chief, General Movses Hakobian, reportedly stated that “his forces have placed more anti-personnel landmines this year along the Armenian-Azerbaijani ‘line of contact’ east and north of the disputed territory.”³ General Hakobian said use was aimed at preventing “sabotage” attacks by Azerbaijani troops.⁴

In a September 2013 response to a letter by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) to authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nagorno-Karabakh did not deny that mines had been used. He said 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.”⁵

As at the end of 2017, 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 under 3.56km² across 73 mined areas (see Table 1).⁶ This is down from 4.41km² across 75 mined areas as at the end of 2016.⁷ The difference in total mine contamination between the end of 2016 and end of 2017, cannot be explained or reconciled by the total area released. Anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mine contamination covered a total of 86 areas over 5.1km² as at end of 2017. As at beginning of September 2018, anti-personnel mine contamination had fallen slightly to just over 3.42km² across 73 mined areas.⁸

Table 1: Anti-personnel mine contamination by province (at end-2017)⁹

| Region | CHAs | Area (km ²) |
|---------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Askeran | 8 | 0.29 |
| Hadrut | 21 | 1.86 |
| Lachin | 19 | 0.55 |
| Martakert | 18 | 0.52 |
| Martuni | 3 | 0.17 |
| Shaumyan | 4 | 0.17 |
| Totals | 73 | 3.56 |

CHA = Confirmed hazardous area

As at April 2017, 88% of mined areas across the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh have been cleared, including 97% of all known minefields in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁰ Of the remaining mined area, 82% is in “green areas” (areas between the traditional Soviet boundary of the autonomous oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, the militarised line of contact with Azerbaijan, and other international borders), and the remaining 18% is within the traditional Soviet-era boundaries.¹¹ Mined areas remain along the line of contact with Azerbaijan, but are inaccessible for clearance as this remains a conflict zone.¹² The HALO Trust is currently conducting survey to quantify the remaining landmine contamination in Nagorno-Karabakh, working in areas that had not been surveyed in the past. This process will continue through to the end of 2018 and into 2019 and therefore, as at August 2018, HALO Trust could not provide exact percentages of clearance.¹³

Minefields in Nagorno-Karabakh are prioritised by two main factors: the density and type of minelaying, and their impact (including proximity to population and economic impact). The HALO Trust has traditionally given highest priority to agricultural areas. Minefields with a higher number of direct beneficiaries have also been prioritised.¹⁴ The vast majority of designated high-priority minefields have now been cleared.¹⁵ Limiting factors, such as climate and donor priorities, mean that, during this process, clearance is not necessarily always conducted according to a simple prioritisation matrix.¹⁶

Most people living in mine-affected areas in Nagorno-Karabakh are dependent on the land for their livelihoods.¹⁷ Mines impede use of land, roads, and other areas, and affect the rural population in particular, whose main income is from herding animals and farming.¹⁸ The bulk of the remaining anti-personnel mine threat in Nagorno-Karabakh is located in wooded hillsides between former Armenian and Azerbaijani military positions. As such, the most vulnerable group of Karabakhis are adult men who are engaged in woodcutting, hunting, and foraging (though women and children often engage in the latter activity as well). A 2017 study from the University of Southern California (USC) into the effects of landmines on livelihoods shows a direct relationship between mines and economic development. According to the analysis of survey data gathered by HALO from over 200 rural households, “the presence of landmines causes, on average, a 45% decrease in overall household economic welfare among the rural population of Nagorno Karabakh.”¹⁹

In 2017, there was one anti-vehicle mine incident involving civilians and one from a submunition victim. There were no anti-personnel mine incidents.²⁰ On 23 July 2017, a truck with three passengers drove over an anti-tank mine near the abandoned village of Novruzlu in Martuni region. The blast wave of the explosion threw the car onto a second mine causing another detonation. All three passengers suffered only mild concussion from the incident.²¹

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

A mine action coordination committee is responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust.²² Regular coordination committee meetings are held between the local authorities, The HALO Trust, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).²³

In 2000, The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMACH), which consolidates all mine-action-related information and responds to requests from the government ministries, other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities.²⁴

Legislation and Standards

No national standards exist in Nagorno-Karabakh and The HALO Trust follows its own standard operating procedures (SOPs).²⁵

Quality Management

The HALO Trust uses its own quality management systems, with quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) applied by four levels of management.²⁶

Information Management

The NKMACH maintains maps and a database of all suspected hazardous areas surveyed, all areas cleared of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), locations of all mine- and ERW-related incidents, and a record of all risk education given.²⁷

Operators

Since 2000, The HALO Trust has been the sole organisation conducting land release in Nagorno-Karabakh. Operations cover both mine and cluster munition remnants (CMR) clearance, and HALO Trust does not field separate teams dedicated solely to either. Operational staff are trained and experienced for both.²⁸

At the peak of its clearance activities in 2017, The HALO Trust had 153 staff in demining and survey roles, an increase over the 142 personnel employed the previous year. Between January and December 2016, its total capacity for mine and CMR operations grew from nine operational teams to fifteen.²⁹ As at August 2017, The HALO Trust was employing 21 manual demining teams, 2 mechanical demining teams, and 2 survey/explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams. In August 2018, The HALO Trust had increased its manual demining teams to 28.³⁰

The HALO Trust deployed two armoured front loaders in 2017, as it did in previous years. Machines are predominantly deployed in clearance of roads with a plastic TM62P anti-vehicle mine threat, and on ground where it is more cost effective for anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mine clearance due, in most cases, to high levels of metal contamination.³¹

While survey and clearance are ultimately conducted by The HALO Trust alone, the Nagorno-Karabakh Rescue Service is involved in various stages of the broader process. For example, the Rescue Service often receives information from local communities about

mine contamination, which it shares with HALO. The Rescue Service is also part of the QA process through its participation in the handover ceremony when The HALO Trust officially returns formerly mined areas back to local communities for safe and productive use.³²

LAND RELEASE

Just over 0.29km² was released by clearance in 2017 while 0.29km² of mined area was cancelled by non-technical survey and 0.27km² was reduced by technical survey. An additional 0.13km² was reported by The HALO Trust as cancelled, due to overly large polygons. This compares to the 0.12km² of mined area that was cleared, 0.28km² reduced by technical survey and 0.36km² cancelled by non-technical survey in 2016.³³ A further 0.22km² was confirmed as containing anti-personnel mines in 2017.

Survey in 2017

In 2017, two mined areas in Hadrut totalling 555,849m² were released through survey, of this 285,747m² was cancelled by non-technical survey and 270,102m² was reduced by technical survey.³⁴ Five suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) were confirmed as containing anti-personnel mines in Askeran, Lachin and Martakert covering 219,355m².³⁵

In addition, The HALO Trust also cancelled 132,024m² due to overly large polygons following clearance of mined areas in Lachin, Martakert, and Martuni.³⁶

In 2016, HALO Trust trialled the use of special detection dogs (SDDs), provided by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), for the reduction of SHAs and confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁷ The HALO Trust has not used SDDs since the 2016 trial ended and a report will be published once follow-up clearance behind the SDDs clearance has been completed.³⁸

Clearance in 2017

In 2017, a total of 28 mined areas covering 292,176m² were released by clearance along with the destruction of 88 anti-personnel mines, 19 anti-vehicle mines, and 36 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO).³⁹ In addition to planned clearance, The HALO Trust destroyed 38 anti-personnel mines during explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) spot tasks in 2017.⁴⁰

Table 2: Clearance and EOD spot tasks in 2017

| Activity | Areas cleared | Area cleared (m ²) | AP mines destroyed | AV mines destroyed | UXO destroyed |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Clearance | 28 | 292,176 | 188 | 19 | 36 |
| EOD spot tasks | 0 | 0 | 38 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 28 | 292,176 | 226 | 19 | 36 |

AP = Anti-personnel AV = Anti-vehicle

During 2017, The HALO Trust found one mine for every 1,974m² of land cleared during anti-personnel mine clearance tasks. HALO Trust also cleared two minefields (one anti-personnel and one mixed anti-personnel/anti-vehicle) without finding any mines. This is largely because the majority of more densely mined areas have already been cleared.⁴¹

Progress in 2018

The HALO Trust has received a commitment from the United States government to complete clearance of all known remaining minefields within Soviet-era boundaries. To this end, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will provide US\$3.5 million over 2018 and 2019 to finish this task. This enables HALO Trust to upscale the programme to more than 30 manual demining teams over the summer months of 2018 and 2019.⁴²

The HALO Trust will continue to clear outside these boundaries through private sources of funding. HALO Trust is also aware of areas within Nagorno-Karabakh which are suspected to be mined and which will need to be surveyed in order to reveal the extent of the problem. HALO's survey teams will focus on preparation of traditional mine clearance tasks ahead of the scale-up and then continue survey of suspected hazardous areas.⁴³

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Nagorno-Karabakh is not a state party to the APMBBC, but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires the clearance of mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.

Despite the clear need to clear mines and ERW – a recent study estimated that the presence of landmines causes a 45% decrease in rural household economic welfare at the national level – Nagorno-Karabakh’s unrecognised status prevents many governments from funding humanitarian activities in the territory.⁴⁴ The HALO Trust receives no funding from Armenia or the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.⁴⁵ Progress in mine clearance has fluctuated over the last five years, as shown in Table 3, but with clearance output averaging below 0.5km² annually.

Table 3: Mine clearance in 2013–17⁴⁶

| Year | Area cleared [km ²]* |
|--------------|----------------------------------|
| 2017 | 0.29 |
| 2016 | 0.12 |
| 2015 | 0.21 |
| 2014 | 0.54 |
| 2013 | 0.31 |
| Total | 1.47 |

* Includes anti-vehicle and anti-personnel mines.

One of HALO’s greatest challenges for mine clearance in Nagorno-Karabakh is the reluctance of bilateral donors to fund clearance in areas outside the Soviet-era boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh. The bulk of the remaining mine problem, however, lies in these surrounding territories. There are also several minefields close to the line of contact that HALO Trust is unable to safely survey or clear, due to ongoing tension between the two sides.⁴⁷

Since 2015, the HALO Trust has received support from an anonymous donor for mine clearance outside the Soviet oblast boundary, along with matching funds, with a view to completing all clearance. This has attracted a number of private individuals and foundations.⁴⁸ The HALO Trust secured a partnership with ONEArmenia, which successfully crowdfunded in 2017 to help raise funds for HALO Trust’s demining operations.⁴⁹ The HALO Trust increased its capacity in April and May 2017, principally as a result of an anonymous donor committing funding for manual clearance teams and matched-funding for clearance of “green areas” outside of the traditional Soviet oblast boundary.⁵⁰

Funding for HALO Trust survey and mine risk education from the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), through its conflict, stability and security fund (CSFF), ended on 31 March 2017.⁵¹

In 2014, HALO Trust reported that full clearance of minefields in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh could be achieved within three years if sufficient funding were available.⁵² As at 2014, 95% of mine contamination in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh had been addressed, and this figure had risen to 97% by April 2017.⁵³ In 2018, HALO Trust reported that full clearance of minefields in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh could be achieved by 2019.⁵⁴

The majority of remaining mined areas are only accessible during the dry summer months of May to October, and HALO Trust planned to expand its clearance capacity through training and to deploy more teams over this period. As at April 2017, clearance in the “green areas” was focused on high- and medium-priority tasks in the Lachin corridor and Martuni region, with private funding; with clearance of the remaining minefields within the traditional Soviet oblast boundary, conducted with USAID funding.⁵⁵

-
- 1 United States Agency for International Development (USAID), "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 2.
- 2 HALO Trust, "Nagorno-Karabakh: The Problem", accessed 12 October 2015 at: <http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/nagorno-karabakh>.
- 3 L. Musayelian, "Karabakh Enhances Defense Capabilities", *Asbarez*, Stepanakert, 26 July 2013, at: www.asbarez.com/112014/karabakh-enhances-defense-capabilities/.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 ICBL, "ICBL gravely concerned about use of anti-personnel mines by Nagorno-Karabakh", Geneva, 20 September 2013, at: <http://www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/Library/News/Nagorno-Karabakh>.
- 6 Email from Amasia Zargarian, Programme Support Officer, HALO Trust, 21 September 2018.
- 7 Email from Ash Boddy, Regional Director Nagorno-Karabakh, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
- 8 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 21 September 2018.
- 9 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018. The difference between reported contamination in 2016 and 2017 (0.71km²) is less than the amount of land released, also taking into account land that was confirmed as contaminated (0.29km² + 0.56km² + 0.13km² - 0.22km² = 0.76km²).
- 10 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
- 13 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 31 August 2018.
- 14 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 15 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
- 16 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 17 HALO Trust website, accessed 15 September 2017 at: <http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/nagorno-karabakh>.
- 18 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 3.
- 19 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018; and The HALO Trust, "The Economic Impact of Landmines In Nagorno-Karabakh: Estimating Causal Effects Using Instrumental Variables", July 2017.
- 20 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 31 August 2018.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013.
- 23 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016.
- 24 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013.
- 25 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. vii.
- 28 Response to Mine Action Monitor questionnaire by Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 22 May 2015.
- 29 Emails from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 27 and 29 April 2017.
- 30 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 31 August 2018.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 33 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
- 34 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 21 September 2018.
- 35 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 36 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 21 September 2018.
- 37 Ibid.; and email from Darvin Lisica, NPA Regional Programme Manager, 2 October 2016.
- 38 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Ibid., and 21 September 2018.
- 41 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 The HALO Trust, "The Economic Impact of Landmines In Nagorno-Karabakh: Estimating Causal Effects Using Instrumental Variables", July 2017.
- 45 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 46 See Landmine Monitor and Mine Action Review reports on Nagorno-Karabakh covering 2012-15.
- 47 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 48 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
- 49 Emails from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April and 28 September 2017.
- 50 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
- 51 Emails from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 and 27 April 2017.
- 52 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 19 March 2014 and 11 June 2015.
- 53 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
- 54 Email from Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 31 August 2018.
- 55 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.