

NAGORNO-KARABAKH

PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

For 2015

For 2014

Problem understood	6	6
Target date for completion of mine clearance	6	3
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	6	5
Improving performance	5	3
PERFORMANCE SCORE: AVERAGE	5.6	5.0

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

While the sparse population in parts of Nagorno-Karabakh means that previously unknown minefields are still occasionally found – typically when a mine is discovered or an accident occurs – HALO Trust believes it has a good understanding of the extent of mine contamination. The list of confirmed mined areas is the result of many years of survey, and HALO has a clear plan for completing clearance of all accessible mined areas by 2020, contingent on securing adequate funding.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should cease all use of anti-personnel mines and provide resources for mine survey and clearance.
- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should formally commit to respect and implement the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and clear all anti-personnel mines.

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 4 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 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."⁵

As at the end of 2015, 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 5.14km² across 82 mined areas (see Table 1).⁶

1 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 2.

2 HALO Trust, "Nagorno-Karabakh: The Problem", undated but 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 Andrew Moore, Balkans and Caucasus Desk Officer, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.

Table 1: Anti-personnel mine contamination by province as at end 2015

Region	Total CHAs containing mines	CHAs with AP mines	CHAs with AP and AV mines	Area (km ²)
Askeran	6	4	2	0.22
Hadrut	24	17	7	3.04
Lachin	26	21	5	0.80
Martakert	17	14	3	0.66
Martuni	6	3	3	0.32
Shaumyan	2	2	0	0.09
Shushi	1	1	0	0.01
Totals	82	62	20	5.14

Previously, in September 2013, mined area was estimated at 1.6km², of which 0.88km² across 34 areas contained anti-personnel mines and 0.73km² across 15 areas contained anti-vehicle mines.⁷ However, this only included contamination within the Soviet-era boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh, and not mined areas in adjacent territories.

To date, HALO Trust has cleared 95% of all known minefields in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh.⁸ While progress has been made, around 70% of remaining contamination – consisting mainly of anti-vehicle mines – is in areas occupied by the Nagorno-Karabakh Defence Forces outside Soviet-era boundaries.⁹ HALO Trust has operated there throughout its presence in Nagorno-Karabakh, but in recent years HALO's activities have reduced due to difficulties in attracting funds to operate in these areas. In addition, mined areas remain along the line of contact, but are inaccessible for clearance as this remains a conflict zone.¹⁰

Five civilian mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) incidents were recorded in 2015, resulting in five casualties, including one fatality.¹¹ Two incidents involved anti-personnel mines, one to a man entering a minefield to rescue an injured cow and the other to a man cutting firewood. Given that Nagorno-Karabakh's population is only about 150,000, this equates to a per capita incident rate of 3.3 per 100,000, one of the world's highest.¹²

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.¹³

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

A mine action coordination committee is responsible for liaising between the de facto government and HALO Trust.¹⁴ Regular coordination committee meetings are held between the local authorities, HALO, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).¹⁵

In 2000, HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKM MAC), which consolidates all mine-action-related information and responds to requests from the de facto government ministries, other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities.¹⁶ NKM MAC maintains maps and a database that covers: suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) surveyed; areas cleared of mines and UXO; locations of mine and UXO incidents; and all risk education given.¹⁷

Standards

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

Quality Management

HALO Trust uses its own quality management systems, with quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) applied by four levels of management.¹⁸

7 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 13.

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

9 Ibid., 19 March 2014.

10 Ibid., 1 October 2016.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 3.

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

15 Ibid, 26 May 2016.

16 Ibid, 28 June 2013.

17 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. vii.

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

Operators

In 1995 and 1996, HALO Trust trained local Karabakhi personnel in demining and left national staff to manage operations. In 1999, HALO Trust returned to find the programme had suffered significant failures, including many accidents and a breakdown of management.¹⁹

Since 2000, HALO Trust has been the sole organisation conducting land release in Nagorno-Karabakh. HALO's operations cover both mine and cluster munition remnants (CMR) clearance, though it does not field separate teams dedicated solely to mine clearance or to CMR clearance. Operational staff are trained and experienced in working in both capacities.²⁰

In 2015, HALO Trust employed an average of 123 local staff for mine and CMR operations.²¹ This represents a decrease compared to 2014, when an average of 167 staff were employed.²²

LAND RELEASE

Almost 0.21km² of mined area was cleared in 2015,²³ compared with 0.54km² in 2014.²⁴

Survey in 2015

No anti-personnel mined areas were surveyed in 2015, but four new anti-vehicle minefields were surveyed.²⁵

Clearance in 2015

In 2015, a total of 18 mined areas covering 209,221m² were released by clearance. Operations destroyed 65 anti-personnel mines, 2 anti-vehicle mines, and 32 items of UXO.²⁶

HALO Trust was also called out to 199 explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) tasks in 2015, during which a further 46 anti-personnel mines and 19 anti-vehicle mines were destroyed, along with 179 submunitions and 907 other items of UXO.²⁷

Where possible, clearance is conducted on confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs), but areas remain that still require technical investigation, in addition to area where technical survey did not produce evidence of mines, but where mine-laying remains strongly suspected.²⁸

The ratio of mines found to area cleared is now relatively low, due to the absence of reliable mapping by former combatants; the sporadic nature of anti-vehicle mine laying in low areas and on former road networks; and the fact that most heavily mined areas have been cleared.²⁹

Progress in 2016

HALO Trust planned to expand its operational capacity in 2016. As at October 2016, HALO was trialling the use of special detection dogs, provided by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), for reduction of SHAs and CHAs in Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁰

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Nagorno-Karabakh is not a state party to the APMBC but nonetheless the authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh have obligations under customary international human rights law to protect life, which requires the clearance of mines as soon as possible.

Despite the clear humanitarian need to clear mines and ERW, Nagorno-Karabakh's unrecognised status prevents many governments from funding humanitarian activities in the territory and HALO receives no funding from Armenia or the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.³¹ Progress in mine clearance has fluctuated over the last five years, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mine clearance in 2011–15³²

Year	Area cleared (km ²)*
2015	0.21
2014	0.54
2013	0.31
2012	1.00
2011	5.31
Total	7.37

* Includes anti-vehicle and anti-personnel mines.

19 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, pp. 20–21.

20 Response to Mine Action Monitor questionnaire by Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 22 May 2015.

21 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May and 1 October 2016.

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

23 Ibid., 1 October 2016.

24 Ibid., 22 May 2015.

25 Ibid., 1 October 2016.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 7 June 2016.

28 Ibid., 1 October 2016.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.; and email from Darvin Lisica, NPA Regional Programme Manager, 2 October 2016.

31 HALO Trust website, accessed 1 October 2016 at: <http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/nagorno-karabakh>; and email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.

32 See Landmine Monitor and Mine Action reports on Nagorno-Karabakh covering 2011–14.

In 2008–10, HALO cleared an average of between 5km² and 6km² of mined area annually and averaged more than 30km² of battle area clearance (BAC). In 2011, however, the UK interrupted its funding and HALO lost 37% of its capacity; consequently, clearance rates declined.³³

A 2013 demining needs assessment by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) concluded that HALO needed to seek and secure additional support and funding to continue its demining operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁴ In October 2013, HALO obtained a grant of US\$5 million from USAID for the next two and a half years.³⁵ In October 2014, Armenian Diaspora organisations, All Armenia Fund (AAF) and Landmine Free Artsakh (LFA), jointly provided HALO Trust with funding for one additional manual team from August 2014 to April 2015.³⁶

In 2015, HALO Trust was receiving 25% less funding from its main donor, USAID, than in the previous year, resulting in a one-third reduction in operational capacity. However, USAID had indicated a willingness to extend HALO Trust's current two-and-a-half-year grant, which ended in March 2016.³⁷ HALO'S funding from USAID subsequently increased for the current US fiscal year (to April 2017) by 50% (on the previous year) to \$1.5 million.³⁸ USAID has instructed that funds be used for clearance within the Soviet-era boundary of Nagorno-Karabakh oblast, and that HALO focus on mine clearance.³⁹

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.⁴⁰ While 95% of mine contamination in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh has been addressed, reduced capacity means that full mine clearance of that area may take longer than expected.⁴¹

Furthermore, significant contamination remains in adjacent territories. Bilateral funding is often restricted to the traditional border of the Soviet oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh, leaving clearance of surrounding territories to private foundations.⁴² In 2016, HALO was planning to expand its operations in adjacent territories with funds from a private foundation.⁴³ HALO estimates that with \$4 million it can clear all accessible, known mined areas by 2020.⁴⁴

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

34 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013.

35 Ibid.; and email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 19 March 2014.

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

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 18 October 2016.

39 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 22 May and 11 June 2015.

40 Ibid., 19 March 2014 and 11 June 2015.

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

42 Ibid., 1 October 2016.

43 Ibid.

44 HALO Trust website, accessed 1 October 2016 at: <http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/nagorno-karabakh>; and email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.