NAGORNO-KARABAKH

MINE ACTION PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE	For 2016	For 2015
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	6	6
Improving performance	5	5
PERFORMANCE SCORE: AVERAGE	5.6	5.6

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

Nagorno-Karabakh's overall performance in 2016 remained constant. Although clearance output in Nagorno-Karabakh decreased in 2016 compared to the previous year, more land was released by survey. 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 not 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.**

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 2016, 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 4.41km^2 across 75 mined areas (see Table 1). This is down from 5.14km^2 across 82 mined areas as at the end of 2015.[6]

Table 1: Anti-personnel mine contamination by province (as at end-2016)[7]

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	23	17	6	2.49
Lachin	22	20	2	0.72
Martakert	16	13	3	0.57
Martuni	6	3	3	0.32
Shaumyan	2	2	0	0.09
Totals	**75**	**59**	**16**	**4.41**

AP = Anti-personnel AV = Anti-vehicle CHAs = Confirmed hazardous areas

To date, 88% of mined areas across the whole of Nagorno-Karabakh have been cleared, including 97% of all known minefields in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh.[8] 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.[9] Mined areas remain along the line of contact with Azerbaijan, but are inaccessible for clearance as this remains a conflict zone.[10]

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). Where possible, The HALO Trust develops its operational strategy based on clearance of identified "high" priority minefields first, before addressing "medium" and "low" priority areas. The vast majority of designated high-priority minefields have now been cleared.[11]

No civilian mine incidents were recorded in 2016;[12] this compares to two incidents involving anti-personnel mines in 2015.[13]

Most people living in mine-affected areas in Nagorno-Karabakh are dependent on the land for their livelihoods.[14] 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.[15] Mined areas cleared by HALO Trust in 2016 were all affecting grazing or agricultural land, and indirectly benefitted 793 people.[16]

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

A mine action coordination committee is responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust.[17] Regular coordination committee meetings are held between the local authorities, The HALO Trust, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).[18]

In 2000, The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMAC), which consolidates all mine-action-related information and responds to requests from the government ministries, other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities.[19] The NKMAC 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.[20]

Standards and Quality Management

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

Similarly, The HALO Trust uses its own quality management systems, with quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) applied by four levels of management.[21]

Operators

In 1995 and 1996, The 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.[22]

Since 2000, The HALO Trust has been the sole organisation conducting land release in Nagorno-Karabakh. HALO Trust's 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.[23]

In 2016, The HALO Trust employed an average of 142 personnel, an increase compared to the 123 average over the previous year, but still an overall decrease in capacity compared to the 167 personnel employed in 2014.[24] Between January and December 2016, its total capacity for mine and CMR operations grew from nine operational teams to fifteen.[25] The HALO Trust increased its capacity in April and May 2017, from 15 manual teams to 20.[26]

The HALO Trust deployed two Volvo armoured front loaders in 2016, 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.[27]

LAND RELEASE

More than 0.12km^2 of mined area was cleared in 2016 and a further 0.28km^2 was reduced by technical survey.[28] In 2015, 0.21 km^2 was cleared.[29]

Survey in 2016

More than 0.28km^2 of mined area was reduced through technical survey, and a further 0.36km^2 was cancelled in two suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) through non-technical survey. Six areas were confirmed as mined, totalling almost 0.18km^2.[30]

In 2016, HALO Trust trialled the use of special detection dogs, provided by Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), for reduction of the size of SHAs and confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) in Nagorno-Karabakh.[31] As at September 2017, the trial was ongoing.[32]

Clearance in 2016

In 2016, a total of 10 mined areas covering 122,448m^2 were released by clearance. Operations destroyed 27 anti-personnel mines, 1 anti-vehicle mine, and 150 items of UXO.[33]

In addition to planned clearance, The HALO Trust was called out to 170 explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) tasks in 2016, during which 90 anti-personnel mines, 21 anti-vehicle mines, and 85 submunitions were destroyed along with 510 other items of UXO, stray ammunition, and air-dropped bombs.[34]

Where possible, clearance is conducted only on 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.[35]

The ratio of mines found to area cleared is now relatively low, due in part 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.[36]

Deminer Safety

The HALO Trust recorded one demining accident in December 2016, but no injuries were sustained.[37]

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Nagorno-Karabakh is neither a state party nor a signatory to the APMBC and therefore does not have a specific clearance deadline under Article 5. Nonetheless, it has 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. The HALO Trust receives no funding from Armenia or the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities.[38] Progress in mine clearance has fluctuated over the last five years, as shown in Table 2, but with clearance output averaging below 0.5km^2 annually.

Table 2: Mine clearance in 2012–16[39]

Year	Area cleared (km^2)
2016	0.12
2015	0.21
2014	0.54
2013	0.31
2012	1.00
Total	**2.18**

* Includes anti-vehicle and anti-personnel mines.

In 2008–10, The HALO Trust cleared an average of between 5km^2 and 6km^2 of mined area annually and averaged more than 30km^2 of battle area clearance (BAC). In 2011, however, the UK interrupted its funding and The HALO Trust lost 37% of its capacity; consequently, clearance rates declined.[40]

The HALO Trust's largest mine action donor in Nagorno-Karabakh, USAID, instructs that funds be used for clearance within the Soviet-era boundary of Nagorno-Karabakh oblast, and US funds to HALO Trust prioritise mine clearance.[41]

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.[42] The HALO Trust secured a partnership with ONEArmenia, which successfully crowdfunded in 2017 to help raise funds for HALO Trust's demining operations.[43]

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.[44]

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.[45] 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.[46] In 2017, HALO Trust reported that full clearance of minefields in Soviet-era Nagorno-Karabakh could be achieved by 2019.[47]

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.[48] 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.[49]

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.[50]

1 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 Andrew Moore, Balkans and Caucasus Desk Officer, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
7 Email from Ash Boddy, Regional Director Nagorno-Karabakh, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
11 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
12 Ibid.
13 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
14 HALO Trust website, accessed 15 September 2017 at: http://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/nagorno-karabakh.
15 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. 3.
16 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
17 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013.
18 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016.
19 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013.
20 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, p. vii.
21 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016.
22 USAID, "De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh", September 2013, pp. 20–21.
23 Response to Mine Action Monitor questionnaire by Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 22 May 2015.
24 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
25 Emails from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 27 and 29 April 2017.
26 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.; and email from Darvin Lisica, NPA Regional Programme Manager, 2 October 2016.
32 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
33 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
34 Ibid.
35 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
36 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 See Landmine Monitor and Mine Action Review reports on Nagorno- Karabakh covering 2012–15.
40 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013.
41 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 22 May and 11 June 2015; and Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
42 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
43 Emails from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April and 28 September 2017.
44 Emails from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 and 27 April 2017.
45 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 19 March 2014 and 11 June 2015.
46 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
47 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 28 September 2017.
48 Email from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 1 October 2016.
49 Email from Ash Boddy, HALO Trust, 3 April 2017.
50 Ibid.