



RUSSIA

MINE ACTION PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE

For 2016

For 2015

Problem understood	5	5
Target date for completion of mine clearance	5	5
Targeted clearance	6	6
Efficient clearance	5	5
National funding of programme	7	7
Timely clearance	4	4
Land release system in place	4	4
National mine action standards	4	4
Reporting on progress	3	3
Improving performance	4	4
PERFORMANCE SCORE: POOR	4.7	4.7

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

Russia is continuing to demine in Chechnya and Ingushetia, but the extent of progress being made and the expected completion date are not known, as this information is not officially reported by Russia.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Russia should accede to and abide by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority, including the prohibition on use of anti-personnel mines.
- Russia should take the necessary measures to identify the extent and impact of mine contamination (in particular in Chechnya and the North Caucasus) and complete clearance of mined areas to humanitarian standards as soon as possible.
- Russia should be more transparent in detailing the extent of its mine contamination and clearance operations.
- Russia should ensure the protection of civilians from munitions in areas it controls or occupies.

CONTAMINATION

Russia is heavily contaminated with mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) as a result of World War II, the two Chechen wars (1994–96 and 1999–2009), and armed conflicts in the Caucasian republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria.

Anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines were used extensively in the two major conflicts in Chechnya. Estimates of the extent of contamination vary greatly because no systematic effort has been undertaken to assess the scope or impact of the problem.¹ In 2010, Russia's deputy prime minister and presidential special envoy to the Caucasus, Aleksandr Khloponin, claimed that mines affected 14km² of land and posed a major obstacle to development.² In contrast, Chechen officials and human rights organisations have previously estimated that 245km² of land was mined, including 165km² of farmland and 73km² of woodland.³

In January 2017, a commander in the Russian Armed Forces reportedly told press agency Interfax that more than 100km² of land remained to be cleared in Chechnya, and a further 20km² in neighbouring Ingushetia.⁴ According to the online media report, areas cleared to date had nearly all been in lowland Chechnya and remaining mined area is in more mountainous terrain, complicating demining efforts.⁵

As at 2011, according to UNICEF, 3,132 civilians, including 772 children, had been killed (731) or wounded (2,401) by mines and ERW in Chechnya since 1994. Data collection, which was conducted by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) partner Voice of the Mountains, was suspended in January 2011, due to lack of funding.⁶

Alleged Use of Mines in Crimea in 2014

Reports of minefields emplaced to demarcate border areas after Russia's annexation of the Crimea, appear to have concerned either 'phony minefields' or areas containing trip-flares. Trip-flares are not covered by the APMBC.⁷

On 8 March 2014, the Israeli newspaper Harts reported that "Russian combat engineers were seen placing mines in the land bridge connecting the [Crimean] peninsula to the mainland in order to foil any Ukrainian attempt to retake Crimea."⁸ The photographer Evgeny Feldman of the Russian publication Novaya Gazeta photographed an apparent minefield laid near a road leading into Crimea and close to the villages of Chongar and Nikolaevka, in Kherson province of Ukraine. The photographs show a line of mounds of earth in a field and 'Danger Mines' warning signs.⁹ Other photographs, shared with Human Rights Watch by a photo-journalist, showed an area near Chongar marked with 'Danger Mines' signs and evidence of stake-mounted, tripwire-initiated flares in the ground, also known as 'signal mines'.¹⁰

Members of the local population informed Ukrainian partners of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) that Russian Special Forces operating in Kherson province had laid mines, but it was not possible to confirm the reports, including whether any mines laid were anti-personnel or anti-vehicle.¹¹ On 7 March 2014, Ukrainian media reported that the Russian military had laid mines around the main gas line into Crimea, but this allegation has not been independently verified.¹²

At a meeting of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in April 2014, Ukraine alleged Russian use of TM-62 anti-vehicle mines and unidentified anti-personnel mines in Kherson province just north of Crimea.¹³ At the same CCW meeting, Russia denied using anti-personnel mines, asserting "the Self Defence forces of Crimea, before the referendum, placed the minefields with relevant markings, around Chongar". Russia said, "they placed only signal mines and put proper signage around the fields".¹⁴

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

There is no formal civilian mine action programme in Russia and no national mine action authority. Mine clearance is carried out by Federal Ministry of Defence engineers, demining brigades of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and by the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES), through its specialised demining units (EMERCOM Demining and the "Leader" Center for Special Tasks).¹⁵

Russia reported that its armed forces established an International Demining Action Centre in 2014. The Centre

serves as a base for specialist training in detection and clearance of explosive devices, demining, and operation of mobile robotic tools, and does not function as a mine action centre (MAC) as the term is generally understood in mine action.¹⁶

Clearance of explosive ordnance in 2016 was reportedly undertaken by 7,264 military personnel, including 684 officers, 63 demining teams, 1,026 vehicles, and 34 pieces of demining machinery.¹⁷

LAND RELEASE

In its CCW Amended Protocol II and Protocol V transparency reports for 2016, Russia reported that its armed forces engineering units conducted demining and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) in 80 regions of the country. In total, more than 306,616 explosive devices were destroyed, including 20,698 improvised explosive devices.¹⁸

In May 2010, a representative of the Chechen branch of Russia's MES claimed that 2.47km² of land had been cleared during the past five years, and that 5,143 explosive devices and 21 air-dropped bombs had been "neutralised".¹⁹ In 2012, the head of the Armed Forces' engineers, Lieutenant-General Yuri Stavitsky, announced that the Federal Ministry of Defence had sent military engineers to Chechnya to clear about 0.5km² of farmland. He said a special battalion of deminers employing contract servicemen was undergoing training for deployment in Russia's southern military district, including Chechnya.²⁰

In March 2014, the engineering unit of the Russian Ministry of Defence was reported in an online article as having started a new phase of clearance in Chechnya. The engineering unit planned to clear 80km² of contaminated land in Achkhoy-Martan and Grozny districts, and in the highlands of Shatoy and Vedeno districts. In 2013, the same unit reportedly demined more than 20km² of agricultural lands, destroying more than 1,700 explosive items.²¹

Further online media reports in November 2014 reported that the demining battalion of the 11th Engineer Brigade of the Russian armed forces had been conducting mine clearance in Chechnya and Ingushetia. During clearance, mechanical assets were used first, followed by mine detectors, and in some instances mine detection dogs (MDDs). According to the article, demining has been conducted since spring 2012 and planned results for three years had been achieved in only two. In 2014, 32km² of land was verified with more than 3,500 explosive devices found and destroyed.²²

Mine clearance operations by engineering units of the Russian armed forces have continued in Russia's "Southern Military District", including Chechnya and Ingushetia.²³ In August 2015, engineers reported completing demining of 1.5km² in Chechnya and Ingushetia over a four-month period, with destruction of around 200 explosive items, including an unknown number of landmines. More than 33km² are said to have been cleared to date in Chechnya and Ingushetia.²⁴ This includes completion of clearance of two districts of Chechnya, Itum-Kali and Achkhoy-Martan, where more than 20km² have been cleared. The land cleared included 7km² for the construction of the "Veduchi" ski resort in Itum-Kale district, and 0.3km² of land for the construction of a thermal power plant in Grozny.

The next stage of demining, in forests, was planned to start in March or April 2016 to clear mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) from more than 70km².²⁵ Both manual and mechanical assets were due to be deployed, including the new Uran-6 robotic demining system.²⁶ The Deputy Chief Engineer of Russia's armed forces, Colonel Ruslan Alahverdiev, has reportedly promised to complete clearance of Chechnya and Ingushetia by 2018.²⁷ However, in the online media report, it was unclear whether Colonel Alahverdiev was referring only to clearing all roads and forests, or if roads and forests are the only remaining mined areas in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

In its CCW Protocol V transparency reports for 2016, Russia reported that the engineering battalion of Southern Military District of the Ministry of Defense are conducting demining of agriculture lands in Chechnya and Ingushetia,²⁸ although the area cleared in these regions was not specified.

Online media, however, reported that between 1 April and 10 November 2016, engineering demining units of the Ministry of Defence demined an area of more than 3,600 hectares [36km²] in Chechnya, during which 450 explosive items were found and destroyed, including ERW. Demining was reportedly conducted in six districts of Chechnya: Achkhoy-Martan, Grozny, Kurchaloy, Vedeno, Shali, and Sunzha.²⁹

In 2016, the Russian Armed Forces responded to 4,004 call-outs from the civilian population, destroying 51,764 items of ERW.³⁰

Progress in 2017

In September 2017, online media reported that combat engineers had been working since April 2017 to clear forests in mountainous areas and foothills in Chechnya.³¹

For 2017, Russia planned to clear 62.3km² of ERW: 12.4km² in the Western Military District, 24.1km² in the Southern Military District, 14.3km² in the Central Military District, 7.7km² in the Eastern Military District, and 3.8km² in the Northern Navy District.³²

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

Russia is not a state party or signatory to the APMBBC but nonetheless has obligations under international human rights law to protect life, which requires the clearance of mines as soon as possible.

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 - 3 "MoE sappers to demine arable land in Chechnya", *Caucasian Knot*, 3 April 2009, at: www.kavkaz-uzel.ru; "In Chechnya MES deminers destroyed 25 explosive devices", *Caucasian Knot*, 5 October 2009; and "Human rights activists: 25,000 hectares of Chechen territory are still mined", *Caucasian Knot*, 7 May 2008.
 - 4 "Landmine threat in Chechnya still prevalent", *OC Media*, 23 January 2017, at: <http://oc-media.org/landmine-threat-in-chechnya-still-prevalent/>.
 - 5 Ibid.
 - 6 Email from Eliza Murtazaeva, Project Officer, Child Protection, UNICEF Vladikavkaz, 2 May 2011.
 - 7 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II defines a phoney minefield as "an area free of mines that simulates a minefield. The term 'minefield' includes phoney minefields." Art. 2(8), CCW Amended Protocol II.
 - 8 A. Pfeffer, "Shots fired to warn off European monitors from Crimea", *Haaretz*, 8 March 2014, at: www.haaretz.com/news/world/premium-1.578588.
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 - 10 Landmine Monitor, Mine Ban Policy Ukraine; and "email from George Henton to HRW", 10 March 2014.
 - 11 ICBL, "Reports of Russian landmine use in Crimea requires immediate response", Geneva, 10 March 2014, at: www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/Library/News/RussiaMineUse3-2014.
 - 12 ICBL, "Reports of Russian landmine use in Crimea requires immediate response", Geneva, 10 March 2014, at: www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/Library/News/RussiaMineUse3-2014.
 - 13 Presentation by Dr. Kateryna Bila, Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Implementation of the Protocol II by Ukraine", CCW Amended Protocol II Meeting of Experts, Geneva, 1 April 2014.
 - 14 Statement of Russia, CCW Amended Protocol II Meeting of Experts, Geneva, 1 April 2014.
 - 15 See, e.g., "It is planned to establish special groups for demining of lands within MES", *Caucasian Knot*, 23 July 2009; and "Autumn demining is completed in Chechnya", *Vesti Kavkaza*, 28 October 2009.
 - 16 CCW Protocol V Article 10 Report, Form B, 31 March 2015; and meeting with Andrey Grebenshchikov, First Secretary, Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Geneva, 9 April 2015.
 - 17 CCW Protocol V Article 10 Report (for 2016), Form A.
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 - 31 "MfE's combat engineers defuse two air bombs in Chechnya", *Caucasian Knot*, 22 September 2017, at: <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/40904/>.
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