

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Russia should accede to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) as a matter of priority.
- Russia should clear anti-personnel mines in areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, consonant with its obligations under international human rights law.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

There is no accurate estimate of the extent of mine contamination but Russia remains contaminated with mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) as a result of the Second World War, 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

According to online media reports, clearance in Chechnya and Ingushetia started in 2012. Between 2012 and 2020, units of the Southern Military District have since surveyed and cleared more than 200km² of agricultural and forest land in Chechnya and Ingushetia, destroying over 37,000 explosives, including landmines. Most of the explosive devices destroyed resulted from the two Chechen wars.⁶

As at 2011, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (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.⁷

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.⁸

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."⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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".¹¹

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.¹² 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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".¹⁵

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).¹⁶

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.¹⁷

EMERCOM reports that it clears about 40,000 items of ERW from the Second World War annually on Russian Federation territory, the bulk of the ERW found are aerial bombs, artillery shells, grenades, and mines.¹⁸

In 2020, Russia reported that 1,989 military personnel, 57 survey personnel, 522 machine operators, and 42 engineers were involved in clearance operations in the Russian Federation.¹⁹

LAND RELEASE

Russia reported clearing 261km² of mined area on Russian Federation territory in 2020, with 105,678 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) found and destroyed.²⁰ The main tasks of Russia's engineering troops in 2020 included clearance in Chechnya and Ingushetia.²¹

As at October 2020, EMERCOM reported clearing 1.47km² of land, destroying 33,000 items of UXO in the process. The clearance was conducted in Tver, Leningrad, Kaliningrad, and New Moscow districts, as well as in Crimea in an historic site of the Kerh fortress. The clearance included underwater clearance in the Baltic and Black seas. The destroyed devices are a legacy of the Second World War.²²

- 1 UNMAS, "Portfolio of Mine Action Projects 2009", New York, 2008, p. 284.
- 2 "Medvedev emphasizes vision of Chechnya's future with personal visit", *Russia Today*, 14 June 2010, at: <https://bit.ly/33H4BgO>.
- 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: <https://bit.ly/33HxfOT>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "Land Without Mines", *RGRU news*, 2 June 2020, (Russian), at: <https://bit.ly/3gcKM93>; "Chechnya. Russian mines continue to kill people", *Caucasus Realities*, 19 December 2019, (Russian), at: <https://bit.ly/3vaMXyd>; "Sappers of the Southern Military District neutralized more than 2 thousand explosive objects on the territory of Chechnya and Ingushetia", *TAC*, 27 November 2019, (Russian), at: <https://bit.ly/3iBuisH>.
- 7 Email from Eliza Murtazaeva, Project Officer, Child Protection, UNICEF Vladikavkaz, 2 May 2011.
- 8 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.
- 9 A. Pfeffer, "Shots fired to warn off European monitors from Crimea", *Haaretz*, 8 March 2014, at: <http://bit.ly/33CeEDv>.
- 10 "Between Crimea and Ukraine there are already minefields, armoured vehicles and army camps", *Novaya Gazeta*, 8 March 2014, at: <http://bit.ly/2H9CehE>.
- 11 Landmine Monitor, Mine Ban Policy Ukraine; and "email from George Henton to HRW", 10 March 2014.
- 12 ICBL, "Reports of Russian landmine use in Crimea requires immediate response", Geneva, 10 March 2014, at: <http://bit.ly/20XjAzL>.
- 13 ICBL, "Reports of Russian landmine use in Crimea requires immediate response", Geneva, 10 March 2014, at: <http://bit.ly/20XjAzL>.
- 14 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.
- 15 Statement of Russia, CCW Amended Protocol II Meeting of Experts, Geneva, 1 April 2014.
- 16 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.
- 17 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.
- 18 "About 40 thousand explosive objects from the time of the Great Patriotic War are annually destroyed by the pyrotechnic units of the Ministry of Emergencies of Russia", EMERCOM media news, 8 May 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3wsuLlr>.
- 19 CCW Protocol II Article 13 Report (covering 2020), Form B.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 CCW Protocol V Article 10 Report (covering 2020), Form F.
- 22 "Pyrotechnicians of the EMERCOM of Russia found and destroyed over 33 thousand explosive objects in 2020", EMERCOM media news, 19 October 2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3xs7y2T>.