

Extension requests for mine clearance under Article 5 of the Mine Ban Convention

ICRC comments on Algeria's request, analyzing group

20 May 2011

I would like to start by thanking the president Mr Gazmend Turdiu and the entire analysing group for having invited the ICRC to this meeting of the analysing group and for giving us this opportunity to share with you our views on the requests submitted so far this year.

With regard to the **Algerian** extension request, we would like to note the following:

The colonial wars in Algeria have left a terrible legacy of minefields, well over 1000 kms long minefields along the Tunisian and Moroccan borders containing over 7 million anti-personnel mines. The Mine Ban Convention entered into force for Algeria in 2002 and extensive achievements have been recorded. The extension request makes it clear that all suspected minefields have been cleared in the south west of the country, while there is 65% of the job still to be done in the minefields in the east of the country, and 35% of the job to be done in the minefields of the north west of the country. Algeria is presenting a well-reasoned and well documented request to obtain an extension of 5 years in order to complete its obligations under article 5 of the Convention. A few questions remain however and some issues would benefit from being clarified by Algeria.

First, on the extent of the contamination remaining:

Although the percentages presented on page 6 of the request give a clear idea of what is remaining to be done and the annexes present a breakdown of each zone, it would be helpful if Algeria were to present a consolidated table of the total figures in km or hectares of mined areas that need clearance throughout the country (so as to present a total amount of remaining contamination in the country). Furthermore, the request should also make clearer that all areas mined by the Algerian military forces around military installations or electrical pylons during the 1990's have been totally cleared (a passing mention of this can be found on the top of p.10). It would also be beneficial if the request were to include details on how much land has been cleared and when. Lastly on this point, we note that the initial article 7 report of Algeria, as well as subsequent ones make reference to other suspected areas mined by terrorist organisations. Algeria agrees that these so-called 'IED's' fall within the definition of article 2.2 of the Mine Ban convention. However, no information on the clearance of these areas is provided in the present request.

Secondly, we would like to share a concern that we have when we read on page 15 of the request that mined areas are not marked in accordance with article 5.2 of the Convention, because marked mined areas, which cannot be monitored by the army, could become a place where terrorists or others would come to search for explosive materials. We shared our concerns with Algeria and we understand that until an area is about to be cleared, there is no marking or warning which would keep the civilian population away from these minefields. Furthermore, in some instances, populated areas are nearby and accidents have happened. Algeria believes that if these areas were to be marked, risks would be too high that explosives could be stolen. It is indeed a difficult balancing exercise but we believe that the analyzing group should ask Algeria for further clarification on this issue.

Thirdly, Algeria calculated that 6 years would be necessary to clear the 887 linear km of minefields in the east of the country in light of past productivity. We understand from the annexes to the request that clearance will be conducted simultaneously both in the east as well as in the north-west. Algeria might be asked to provide more details about how these military contingents will work over the next 6 years, the type of terrain they will meet and the sorts of factors that could impede timely completion of Algeria's obligations under Article 5 of the Mine Ban Convention.

In the east of the country, Algeria believes that 160 linear km of minefields can be cleared per year. These targets seem achievable but remain ambitious. If we compare with Jordan for example, 3 years were needed by Jordan to clear 110km of minefield at its northern border with Syria (at a rate of therefore around 35 km a year). Has Algeria considered using other methods than manual clearance and mixing different demining methods to maximize the amount of clearance done yearly?

Finally, it is important to mention that Algeria has itself funded all mined clearance activities since the entry into force of the Convention. This fact should be welcomed by States Parties. Algeria does not seem to request any external financial support but does not give any details of the amount of money already spent in clearance activities or what the costs of the next 6 years will be. We believe that it might be beneficial for Algeria to open up to other States' experiences in demining similar terrain. On the one hand, Algeria might learn from their expertise and, it might also be able to provide other States with valuable experiences and lessons learned. This process might open up avenues for Algeria to complete clearance even before 2017.