

ICRC Statement

Serbia's Extension Request

Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies

28 May 2013

The International Committee of the Red Cross would like to commend Serbia for efficiently clearing most of its mined areas since the entry into force of the Convention for it. The ICRC considers Serbia's request for a 5-year extension to be realistic in view of the recent discovery of additional mined areas in two municipalities. As we have heard today from Serbia, it may be able to fulfil its Article 5 obligations faster than expected, subject to several factors.

The first, and most important factor, is the question of funding. On the one hand, Serbia's decision to seek international support through the mechanism of ITF - Enhancing Human Security might help with resource mobilisation. On the other hand, according to the extension request Serbia has faced increasing difficulty to attract international funds for mine clearance. We would therefore encourage Serbia to attempt to finance as much of the mine clearance itself as possible, both to partially address the reported reduction in international funding and to send a positive signal to donors about national commitment to the issue.

The second "unknown" relates to the 2.08 km² of suspected hazardous areas. The plan and timelines will need to be re-assessed after each year of survey of these areas, and thoroughly reviewed once survey work is finished. Serbia should be encouraged to provide annual updates to the States Parties and submit a revised plan if necessary.

Third, while we welcome the fact that Serbia is trying to tackle the clearance of anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war, the need to tackle different forms of contamination could influence the clearance plan under Article 5. We hope that Serbia will adopt an efficient land release model, to reassess mined areas prior to conducting full clearance, which should enable valuable resources to be saved for other contaminated areas.

Pending completion of clearance operations, it is important that Serbia conduct Mine Risk Education activities with affected communities to ensure the safety of the population.

Finally, in light of the relatively recent discovery of these mined areas, we urge Serbia to continue to ensure that it has made every effort to identify any other mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, in accordance with Article 5(2) of the Convention. To this end, the ICRC would recommend that Serbia conduct a comprehensive mapping of the confirmed mine-free regions as soon as possible, involving regional and municipal authorities.

In sum, the ICRC supports Serbia's request for a 5-year extension but hopes that Serbia will be able to meet its Article 5 obligations sooner than expected. Progress will depend in particular on: Serbia securing financial support, including, we hope, from its national budget; confirmation of the true extent of contamination following completion of the survey, and ensuring the most efficient operations possible.