

AZERBAIJAN AND OTTAWA PROCESS

The mine problem in Azerbaijan is mainly the consequence of the armed conflict due to the territorial claims of Armenia to Azerbaijan. The hostilities were suspended in May 1994 by establishing cease-fire. 20% of Azerbaijani territories remain occupied by Armenian forces and there are about million internally displaced persons and refugees settled in shelters dispersed all over the country.

The conflict had long and violent character. All kinds of conventional weapons, including antitank and antipersonnel landmines have been used. The situation is worsened by the fact that in many cases there are no maps with exact mine field locations which could be explained perhaps by involvement of irregular military formations from both sides that were not trained to record the process while laying mines. Nonetheless tens of thousands of antitank and antipersonnel mines have been disposed by Azerbaijani Army sappers during 1994-96.

The Government of Azerbaijan has supported from the outset the idea of having a comprehensive international legal document on prohibition of use, stockpiling, production and transfer of antipersonnel mines. Our country has learnt to its own cost the catastrophe that this ammunition can lead to. Therefore Azerbaijan advocates demining and destruction of mines. Azerbaijan shares all concerns taken into consideration while coming to the statement of the Convention and is involved neither in transfer, transportation, nor in production of antipersonnel mines. But continued conflict prevents Azerbaijan from acceding to the Document.

In 1999 exhaustive rehabilitation programme named "Great Rehabilitation" was developed to be implemented in case the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan is settled and occupied territories are liberated. One of the key points of the Programme is the recognition of a ban of anti-personnel mines as a confidence-building measure, envisaging open and transparent exchange of all known information on mines emplaced.

The Government of Azerbaijan sincerely believes that the process will come to its logical end by restoration of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and peace for its multinational population.

Azerbaijan is still in the conflict with Armenia, the State not party of the Convention occupying our territories, not hiding its aggressive intent to keep these areas and assuming more and more weapons, today through announced and expected withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia. We are concerned with the continued increase of military capabilities of Armenia, including transfer of Russian weaponry. We hope that Armenia and Russia will respect the norms and principles of international law and comply with their obligations under arms control treaties. It should be noted as well that Armenia is a producer of landmines, both antipersonnel and antitank. There is information regarding a production of different types of mines on the territory of Armenia.

Current situation within the process of settlement allows us to pin the realistic hopes for a breakthrough in peace talks in a foreseeable future, especially after the last meeting of the Presidents of two countries in Warsaw. And once agreement on the settlement of the conflict is achieved we shall face a great challenge of large-scale demining operation in evacuated territories, where we should have a great international assistance. At the same time, peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan will open up the prospects for our soonest accession to the Convention.

Use of anti-personnel mines is the legacy of the Soviet time, as is the conflict we are suffering from. It is already much done in Azerbaijan to overcome this legacy. The Government of Azerbaijan faced the mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) problem in 1996 when started the implementation of full-scale program aimed at rehabilitation and reconstruction of the infrastructure destroyed in the war affected territories of Azerbaijan to resettle the internally displaced persons (IDPs). As a result, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action, ANAMA has been established in July 1998 to control, manage and coordinate mine action activities in Azerbaijan. The Government is encouraged by UNDP to follow humanitarian standards, developed within the Ottawa Process as well, is acting through ANAMA in disposing explosives remnants of war the framework of the "Azerbaijan Mine Action Programme".

It is worth to stress that Azerbaijan is unilaterally committed to non producing and non accumulating. We are currently considering some other obligations under Convention which we could take without acceding to that. Actually, Azerbaijan without haven't been acceded to the Convention is fulfilling some provisions of the Convention.

These are the Article 5(1) to destroy or ensure the destruction and Article 5(2) under which the State Party is obliged to identify and mark all known hazards.

In July there will be 5 year already since Azerbaijan started humanitarian demining operations and to date cleared out more than 16 mln sqm of mined areas destroying more than 6 thousands mines and UXOs.

Since its inception ANAMA has actually performed two impact surveys to identify suspected hazardous areas. Having a limited capacity, we are still to respond to emergency needs, mainly follow priorities set by the Government.

But there exist the Strategic Plan developed based on LIS from 2003 to meet clearance objectives within the time frame set by the Convention. We are doing the utmost to mobilize assistance to ensure meeting the obligations under strategic plan. We are highly appreciating all those who helped us and continuing their support in alleviating human suffering due to the landmines in Azerbaijan. Without this invaluable support it was not possible to fulfill all done by ANAMA in areas of capacity building, survey, mine clearance, information management, mine risk education and mine victim assistance. We are grateful namely to the UNDP and EC, to the governments of Canada, Italy, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, UK and US for provision of funds, all necessary equipment and services, expertise and skills. I would like to emphasize the contribution of the Government of Azerbaijan committed to stop human suffering from mines and UXOs, contribution increasing from year to year that brings positive interest of donors' community to mine and UXO problem in Azerbaijan.

Taking the opportunity of being here in Switzerland, I would like to pass our deep gratitude for all done by your country, in kind, very invaluable by nature and still being a part of ANAMA capacity. These are technical expertise, hi-tech materials and equipment. Hereby we have to emphasize invaluable contribution of GICHD in policy and standards development and guidance and information management capacity building in Mine Action.

In this sense the role of Convention may not be ignored. The Convention became a powerful advocacy tool for making international community aware of mine problem and its consequences. The Convention raised the commitment of all involved to resolve the problem or assist others in its resolution.

No restrictions were put by Convention on assistance to be provided to all in need of this. However, the position of some donor countries we treated with high respect and understanding has changed and this caused decrease of funding for the care and rehabilitation, social and economic reintegration of mine victims and for mine risk education activities in year 2003. Last year we were able to make a breakthrough in mine victim assistance direction, conducting needs assessment survey and preparing firm basis for in-country coordination of this activity. The significant achievements have been made in MRE introduced into school curriculum and implemented at community level.

Problems are still obvious with raising funds. Most countries have the problem of mines and UXOs and many others should care of mine victims, destroy stockpiled anti-personnel under their obligations as State Parties.

Someone could find identity of our Programme points with Article 6 of the Convention. Yes, the founders of the Programme, being committed to meet these goals in expectation of soonest settlement of the conflict, built the skeleton of ANAMA based on this. We are grateful to all of them as they made all necessary provisions for ANAMA to be involved in Ottawa process, for others to be able to follow Agency activities as having been conducted in openness and transparency.

Apart from known limitations coming from national security concerns Azerbaijan is considering to provide transparency reports under Article 7 of the Convention. All procedures concerning preparation of this report are being implemented by ANAMA in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. Should the conflict have settled and Azerbaijan signed the Treaty, the mechanism is ready to coordinate this report and submit it to the UN Secretary-General.