

Statement on Mine Clearance
by
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Director of Thailand Mine Action Center
at the Meetings of the Standing Committees of the Convention on the
Prohibition, Stockpiling, Production and Use of Anti-Personnel Mines
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Co-Chairs,
Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the Thai delegation, it is my great pleasure to take part in these Inter-sessional Meetings of the Mine Ban Convention. As Thailand is among the first group of States Parties with a mine clearance deadline by the year 2009, under Article 5 of the Convention, and is one of the countries to have submitted a request for an extension of this deadline, I have the honour to update the State Parties regarding recent developments in mine clearance in Thailand as well as to share our experience on mine clearance over the past 9 years.

It can be said that during certain periods over the past 50 years, some of Thailand's border areas have been faced with conflicts. Consequently, these areas have been left contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnances (UXO). The Landmine Impact Survey conducted by the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) during September 2000 to May 2001 identified that there were 2,557 Sq. Km. of contaminated areas along all four borders, with the heaviest concentration on the Thai-Cambodian border.

As of April 2008, TMAC has cleared an area of 55.9 Sq. Km., or about 2 percent of the total contaminated area as identified by the NPA. Circumstances that have impeded Thailand's ability to comply with its Article 5 obligation are the overestimated mine contaminated areas as a consequence of the Level 1 Impact Survey, the geographical nature of the mined areas which are mostly tropical jungle and dangerously sloped terrain, limited resources and financial support due to other urgent and competing priorities, such as natural disasters and the situation of unrest in the 3 southern provinces, and lastly, the traditional mine clearance method used which has

proven to be very slow and costly.

TMAC also found that in most of the suspected contaminated areas that have been cleared, only a small number of landmines were found and, in some areas, there were no landmines found at all. Taking this into account, TMAC has decided to adopt a new approach to mine clearance instead of the traditional mine clearance method which consumes a great amount of time and resources.

Since May 2007, TMAC has adopted the *Locating Minefield Procedure* in order to identify the exact size and location of the minefields, by re-surveying and re-collecting reliable information in the contaminated areas identified by Level 1 Impact Survey. We will then use this data to make a more effective and practicable mine clearance plan.

The Locating Minefield Procedure essentially involves: collecting and analyzing data from the Level 1 Impact Survey and past accidents from TMAC database, satellite images, and history of fighting, local military units and interviewing of local villagers, ex-military personnel, and ex-insurgents in order to identify possible minefields. After that, maps of the possible minefields in suspected areas are drawn up, leading to the final phase, which is the field confirmation done by the technical survey teams.

There are 3 models for this process, namely, canceling survey, releasing survey, and boundary survey.

- The Canceling Survey is done by analyzing data from the Level 1 Impact Survey and from the fact that those areas which have been used for over a confident period of time for farmlands, recreational areas, lakes, etc. have shown no evidence of explosive hazard. These areas will be identified as safe areas.

- The Releasing Survey is done in low contaminated areas where a random check is made by technical survey. Areas with negative results will also be identified as safe areas.

- The Boundary Survey is for high contaminated areas where the majority of the areas show evidence of explosive hazard and will be marked and identified as minefields.

The methods and equipment that could also be used together with the Locating Minefield Procedure are deminers, mine detection dogs, and mechanical equipment for technical survey. And EOD teams would also be deployed to clear spot tasks during the procedure.

The expected outcomes of the area reduction are that many landmine contaminated areas will be reduced. At the same time, the realistic size and accurate location of minefields will be identified, many safe areas will be released for public use, new clearance priority can be obtained, and a final mine clearance plan can be made more effective and practicable.

From May 2007 to April 2008, TMAC has followed the Locating Minefield Procedure and identified the minefield areas of 251.54 Sq. Km. out of the 1,492.18 Sq. Km. of contaminated areas.

These pictures show how the contaminated areas are reduced to smaller minefields.

These pictures show how the technical teams work in the field.

From 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2008, TMAC has deployed 4 HMAUs in the contaminated areas and has executed the Locating Minefield Procedure in order to identify actual minefields. It is estimated that the final figure of the actual minefields will be approximately 500 Sq. Km.

The responsible areas and number of personnel of each HMAU are shown in the pictures.

Despite our efforts to develop more innovative methods and tools to expedite the process of mine clearance, the mine-suspected areas in Thailand still remain rather large. Thailand has therefore submitted a request for an extension of its mine clearance deadline to the President of the 8MSP in March 2008. Based on our present demining capacity, expected budget plan as well as unforeseen circumstances, Thailand has sought an extension for a period of 9.5 years, starting from May 2009 until November 2018, to complete its mine clearance process.

Once again, Thailand wishes to reaffirm its political commitment to complete its mine clearance obligations within the requested extension period. We wish to make it clear that although Thailand has submitted a

request for an extension of its deadline for mine clearance, this should not be interpreted as complacency on our part. Rather, Thailand is fully aware that a lot more remains to be done. We will continue to apply all the lessons learnt with regard to mine clearance to our future work plan. We are confident that the past experiences for almost one decade have gradually helped to crystallize our understanding on the mine clearance practices that proved to be best suited to our circumstances and unique political geography and landscape.

Having said this, it is without doubt that mine clearance is indeed still a real challenge for Thailand. The Thai Government will continue to mobilize its internal resources and to develop the existing capacities and resources. In the meantime, Thailand will increase its efforts to mobilize financial and technical support from the international community in accordance with Article 6 of the Convention. It is our belief that States Parties have the primary responsibility for mine clearance within their territories. However, support from the international community is without doubt an essential factor contributing to the success of mine clearance in any particular country, including Thailand.

In conclusion, Mr. Co-Chairs, Thailand stands ready to provide further clarification and information with regard to the extension request and is ready to share our first hand experience on the Locating Minefield Project. We hope that under the able guidance of the Co-Chairs, this meeting will be conducted smoothly and in a cooperative and constructive manner, which is in the true spirit of the Convention.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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