

ICBL Comments on Extension Requests - Colombia
10th Meeting of the States Parties of the Mine Ban Treaty
29 November 2010



Colombia's extension request has several positive elements, including the plan to finish clearing all military bases before its deadline, a continuing large national contribution to mine action and projections for even higher levels in the future, and a plan to increase military demining capacity and to open Colombia up to mine action by civilian deminers. At the same time, the request highlights the difficulties Colombia has faced in trying to quantify the amount of contaminated areas due to insecurity and the continuation of mine use by NSAGs. In the ICBL's view, the request could have gone much further in acknowledging the fact that survey and clearance are not possible in most suspected areas for security reasons, and for this reason it is not possible to have a reliable estimate of current or future contamination on which to base demining and funding plans.

Colombia does include information on 14 municipalities that it plans to clear from 2011-13 because they are judged to meet the security and political conditions to begin clearance. But it does not state if these 14 areas constitute *all* the areas deemed ready for demining, or whether there is in fact a larger number of municipalities that could be safely demined if more resources were made available. In other words, it is unclear whether an increase in capacity (through more NGO deminers and/or more funding) would enable Colombia to achieve more in the next three years, or if this is the maximum Colombia feels it can achieve in the existing political circumstances. More broadly, it would be useful to know what the total suspected hazardous area is in those parts of Colombia that are judged safe to survey and clear (leaving aside for now the other areas, where safe/accurate survey is not possible). We recommend such information be clearly provided at the 10MSP.

We would also like to know more about progress in developing the necessary laws and/or regulations to allow civilian deminers to operate. As around two-thirds of the planned resources and a large portion of the demining capacity from 2011-2020 are expected to come through civilian deminers, the operational plan becomes highly questionable if the legal framework is not developed quickly.¹

We had suggested to Colombia and the Analysing Group that it would be more logical for Colombia to request an extension only for the time needed to carry out its 2011-2013 plan, at which point it could prepare another request based on the progress, challenges, and political context at that time.

A next best solution we suggested would be for States Parties to include a set of benchmarks in their decision that would allow them to regularly review progress as well as the evolving security context. We believe the decision on Colombia's request should include specific annual objectives based on the commitments laid out in Colombia's request - such as the number of municipalities to be cleared or

¹ For example, the request predicts that the number of civilian demining squads will increase from 2 in 2011 to over 40 in 2017 and beyond, and US\$180 million of the budget are expected to come through civilian demining organizations. See Colombia Extension Request, 5 August 2010, p. 58 and 67.

released through other means by both military and by civilian deminers, the number of teams (military and civilian) available for demining or survey, the number of municipalities or other areas to survey per year, annual commitments of funding – as well as other time-bound goals such as the creation of a legal framework for civilian deminers to operate by the end of 2011.

We welcome Colombia's commitment to return to the 11MSP with a report on improved methods for identifying suspected hazardous areas and to the 13MSP with a new three-year plan based on experience from 2011-13, and we hope to see these commitments reflected in the final decision on its request. Currently the request provides little information on the post-2013 period, though it projects a large and sharply-increasing amount of human and financial resources and productivity for this period. States Parties should therefore have an opportunity to provide significant feedback on the new plan, including via questions and comments from the Analysing Group. At that point an additional set of benchmarks based on the new plan should be developed by States Parties.