



**THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

**18<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction**

**Geneva, 16-20 November 2020**

**Agenda item 9.b**

**Clearing mined areas, Mine Risk Education and Reduction**

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**Mr. President, esteemed colleagues,**

### ***Clearing***

At the beginning of November 2020, hazardous area (HA) in the Republic of Croatia covered 270 km<sup>2</sup>, as a result of demining activities and technical and non-technical survey, and it was determined inside 8 counties and 48 towns and municipalities contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance. On the basis of available minefield records, we presume that the HA is contaminated with approximately 18,753 mines. At the moment, the entire HA of the Republic of Croatia is marked with more than 11,454 warning signs, i.e. approximately 42 warning signs per square kilometre of hazardous area. According to HA structure, 98% comprises forests and forest land. Marking of HA and continuous mine risk education in the past few years resulted in the fact that there have been no mine accidents or incidents with fatalities (the last fatality was in 2016).

I am proud to draw attention to the fact that, as of 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020, the Republic of Croatia is clear of cluster munition remnants contamination and has submitted a declaration of compliance with Article 4 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Furthermore, we would like to inform the states parties that, in accordance with the approval of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Request to extend the deadline to fulfil the obligations, the Republic of Croatia has submitted a Revised work plan on meeting the obligations of Article 5 of APMBBC. The stated document contains an updated overview of all the confirmed and suspected areas to be contaminated with ERW, as well as all other updated annual implementation and financial projections harmonised with Oslo Action Plan guidelines and with the final goal of Croatia without mines by 2026, for the achievement of which it will be necessary to provide approximately 300 million EUR.

In the current year, the Republic of Croatia is on track to achieve the planned mine action goals, in spite of a two-month standstill of demining activities caused by the pandemic and a reduction of budget funds earmarked for demining, fortunately, only by 3.6%. As of November 2020, the implementation rate of land release is within the planned framework, and more than 10,000 ERW have been found and destroyed. Financial projections for next year also envisage reduction of the state budget funds by slightly less than 4%, but next year another extensive demining project co-financed by the European Union Cohesion fund will begin, so we justifiably believe in achieving the planned dynamics of land release.

### ***Mine Risk Education (MRE)***

Regular mine risk education activities conducted by the Civil Protection Directorate with police officers and civil society associations were conducted in line with the annual Mine Risk Education and Informing Plan, until restrictions were imposed in line with epidemiological measures. 47 programmes were implemented with participation of approximately 4,600 citizens (mainly preschool and school children and residents of areas in the vicinity of HA). Unfortunately, the pandemic resulted in ceasing activities of mine risk education in kindergartens, schools and in larger groups, but online education and education by means of printed leaflets and brochures continued.

In addition to regular MRE activities, I would like to emphasize two specific projects from this field conducted in Croatia.

The first one is *NATURAVITA*, a strategic project mainly funded by the European Union Cohesion fund, the implementation of which has already been reported at similar gatherings due to its great success. In less than two years, 25.39 km<sup>2</sup> of forests and forest land in protected areas and areas of Natura 2000 ecological network were released through the Project. During the project, a very large number of ERWs were found, several times exceeding the

annual indicators in previous years. After finalizing the demining activities at the beginning of the year, project activities continued with the renovation of an educational visitors centre where mine risk education programs will be conducted. In addition to development of educational programs for specific target groups along with the guidelines for the mentioned, educational materials intended to raise awareness on mine threats (leaflets, brochures, picture books) are also developed. These tools are tailored towards the target groups such as elementary and secondary school pupils, university students, hunters, fishermen, forest workers, hikers and other interested groups. Also, an educational play on mine risk is foreseen for the youngest pupils, adapted to their age.

Secondly, I would like to emphasise the involvement of the Croatian Red Cross in the field of mine risk education. They are about to publish the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the updated manual *Learning to Live with the Danger of Mines and Explosive Remnants of War*", which will be published in 1000 copies in English. As such, the manual is intended to inform citizens of other countries facing the problem of mine and ERW contamination. In this way, the experience of the Croatian Red Cross may be beneficial to those who, unfortunately, need it.

In the MRE context, it is worth mentioning a working visit of the Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Temporarily Occupied Territories, during which the Civil Protection Directorate of the Croatian Ministry of the Interior presented activities of the Croatian Mine Action System and the

To conclude, Mr. President, esteemed colleagues, implementation of land release and mine risk education in 2020, in spite of unfavourable conditions, has almost reached the projected indicators of the annual revised plan, at the same time meeting all epidemiological measures. Considering the Oslo Action Plan guidelines, presented results may be deemed very successful, and we hope that more favourable epidemiological situation will enable the same or faster rate of our engagement in future years, with the aim of meeting the deadlines of fulfilling obligations under the Convention.

Thank you