



Permanent Representation
of the Federal Republic of Germany
to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva

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Hellmut Hoffmann

Ambassador, Permanent Representative
of the Federal Republic of Germany

Geneva, 9 April 2013

Your Excellency,

In reference to your letter, dated 27 February 2013, my Government has asked me to transmit the enclosed request for the extension of a deadline for clearance of a previously unknown area that is suspected to contain anti-personnel mines.

Yours sincerely,



Hellmut Hoffmann

- Ambassador -

Federal Republic of Germany

Request for an extended deadline

The Federal Republic of Germany ratified the Convention on 23 July 1998 and the Convention entered into force for Germany on 1 March 1999. Germany's original deadline for implementing the obligation to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control would have been 1 March 2009 had Germany known of and hence reported such areas prior to that date.

In June 2011 (i.e., after its original deadline to implement Article 5 had expired), Germany informed the Convention's Standing Committee on Mine Clearance that it had discovered a previously unknown area under its jurisdiction suspected to contain anti-personnel mines. Specifically, Germany indicated that an initial survey of potential future uses of a former military training area in Wittstock, in the German federal state of Brandenburg, had concluded that the former training area probably contained anti-personnel mines and other unexploded ordnance.

At the Eleventh Meeting of the States Parties from 28 November to 2 December 2011, Germany further informed the States Parties that ownership of the area, which had previously been under military supervision, had been transferred in October 2011 to the Institute for Federal Real Estate, or Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben (BIMA). Germany further informed the States Parties that local authorities had issued a directive to ensure the effective exclusion of civilians from the area in question, that a mine risk education programme had been developed and its implementation started, and that a strategic action concept had been drawn up in order to create the necessary infrastructure for further targeted survey.

In 2012, when submitting updated information, as required by Article 7 of the Convention, on the location of all mined areas that contain or are suspected to contain anti-personnel mines under Germany's jurisdiction or control, Germany formally reported the former military training area Wittstock in the north of the federal state of Brandenburg as an area suspected to contain anti-personnel mines. Germany also reported that the military training area was used by the former Soviet armed forces, that after this area was inherited by the German armed forces in 1993, some scattered mines, including some anti-personnel mines, were found, and all found mines were destroyed. In addition, Germany reported that a historic survey was ongoing, that a public tender for clearance was intended and that a first survey would be conducted.

Further to its commitment to be highly transparent and to keep the States Parties informed with respect to the discovery, Germany provided additional information on the area in question to the May 2012 meeting of the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance. Germany reported that the entire area in question encompasses about 144 square kilometres and reiterated that partial contamination with anti-personnel mines could not entirely be excluded. Germany further reported that the technical survey and, if necessary, clearance of a 40 kilometre long by 50 metre tract of land would be undertaken in 2012 to ensure fire prevention and environmental protection, that a network of paths and tracks was being cleared in 2012 to enable emergency management, and that these activities were crucial prerequisites for the continuation of the technical survey, mainly to ensure the safety of the personnel involved in clearance. Germany reiterated its commitment to keep States Parties informed about further developments.

In keeping with the commitments made by the States Parties through decisions taken at the 2012 Twelfth Meeting of the States Parties, Germany, believing that it will be unable to confirm or deny the suspicion of the presence of anti-personnel mines in the former military training area Wittstock, and, if necessary, destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines contained within prior to the 2013 Thirteenth Meeting of the States Parties, hereby requests an extended deadline as per (31 December 2015). Germany has been impeded in completing implementation sooner as a result of the late discovery of the area in question and the need to carry out survey activities regarding the extensive UXO contamination in a systematic manner in order to ensure the safety of those involved.

The Infrastructure Plan presented at the Twelfth Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention on 7 December 2012 encompasses in particular measures to ensure operational safety, including fire control. To this end, a technical survey of important access and escape routes, potential areas of suspected UXO contamination in the environs of neighbouring locations or necessary firebreaks is being conducted using geomagnetic survey methods.

Work on this survey was begun in the tenth calendar week of this year. It should be completed in the summer of 2013. On the basis of the information gained from the survey, the necessary follow-up measures will then be carefully planned and executed. The implementation of the Infrastructure Plan is a prerequisite for all further survey and clearance activities on the site. For only when the infrastructure can reliably protect workers' safety will it be possible to access the area of suspected APM contamination without danger. Once this reliable infrastructure is in place, the technical experts believe that the area of suspected APM contamination can be completely cleared by December 2015.

As a result of previous survey activities referred to above, it has been possible to reduce the area of suspected APM contamination to approximately 10,000 m² in the north-east of the property. The site

in question is an exercise ground (network of positions) used by the infantry of the former Soviet armed forces. The last decade has resulted in a dense growth of ground vegetation, shrubs and trees.

- The suspected area of contamination will not be subjected to the intermediate step of a test area survey. Clearance will be started once the requisite infrastructure has been established in the immediate vicinity.

A particular difficulty in clearing the site is presented by the thick vegetation covering the area of suspected contamination. The APM are thus not readily visible. Nor can metal detectors be used, since the metal content of the mines is too low. It must also be presumed that the APM were, as is usual, hidden in the ground, which means that it would not be safe to access the area on foot and prepare it in advance.

Germany has two possible ways forward. Given the circumstances outlined above, the area must either be cleared manually, which, in view of the dense vegetation on the site and the high risks typical of the type of munition, would be a very slow, labour-intensive process with high safety costs. The alternative would be some form of mechanical clearance using vehicles that are able to clear mines to a sufficient depth even on ground that could not be cleared of vegetation in advance. However, any such machines would also have to be able to safely remove other kinds of UXO which have more explosive power and may be interspersed with the APM. Clearance would be undertaken in accordance with the German national regulations on explosive ordnance disposal.

We should be in a position to commence clearance work on the suspected area of APM contamination in 2014 – once the envisaged tendering process has been concluded.

It is too early to estimate the costs of clearing the entire area suspected of contamination, since they depend to a large extent on the clearance method adopted and on the outcome of the envisaged tendering process, if such is required. The costs will be met by the Institute for Federal Real Estate.

As regards the humanitarian, social, economic and environmental implications of the extension, the area concerned is an environmentally contaminated area which will be restored in accordance with the requirements of the Convention. It cannot at present be entered, nor can it be used. No commercial use, as narrowly defined, is envisaged. The area will remain part of the nature protection area in the Kyritz-Ruppiner-Heide, which is managed by the Institute for Federal Real Estate as part of the European NATURA 2000 network. The public will only be permitted to access the area once the entire site has been fully cleared and has been approved for access by the responsible regulatory agency.

In keeping with the commitments States Parties made at the Twelfth Meeting of the States Parties, Germany shall continue to fulfil its reporting obligations under Article 7 of the Convention, including

the obligation to report on the location of mined areas that contain or are suspected to contain anti-personnel mines under its jurisdiction or control and on the status of programmes for their destruction. Germany will also continue to provide updates relative to these and other commitments at meetings of the Standing Committees, Meetings of the States Parties and Review Conferences.

Detailed photographic and cartographic materials are currently being prepared.