

Mine Action Programme of Tajikistan Status and Challenges in Implementation

Tuesday, 22 May 2019

Introduction and participants

On 22 May 2019, Tajikistan and the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention with the support of the Implementation Support Unit invited state and civil society representatives to engage on Tajikistan's needs and challenges in mine action. In particular its efforts to complete its mine clearance commitments by 2025. Following opening remarks by the Ambassador of Tajikistan to the United Nations in Geneva, a presentation by the Tajikistan National Mine Action Centre and Norwegian People's Aid, humanitarian mine action actors, operating in Tajikistan participants engaged in an informal discussion about possible avenues of cooperation and assistance in support of Tajikistan's efforts. Participants received a package including an invitation, agenda and Tajikistan's presentation, (delivered version attached). Where not publicly available, these can be obtained through the ISU (isu@apminebanconvention.org) by those in a position to provide assistance.

Participants

States: Australia, Croatia, Finland, Norway, United States, Zimbabwe.

Convention representatives: Sweden, (Chair, Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance), Netherlands, (Chair, Committee on Article 5 Implementation), Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (Members of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance), Representatives of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit

Organizations: Afghanistan Directorate of Mine Action Coordination, European Union, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Fondation Suisse de Deminage (FSD), Mines Advisory Group (MAG), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United States (Department of State).

Presentation

Mr. Muhabbat Ibrohimov, Director of The Tajikistan National Mine Action Centre presented on its achievements during the previous extension request, (2010-2018). Mr. Ibrohimov indicated that significant progress has been made and drew attention to the important nationalization of the program and establishment of the program within the government which also included the establishment of a training centre. Furthermore, Mr. Ibrohimov highlighted the importance of the law passed by the government on humanitarian mine action, the adoption of the national humanitarian mine action strategy 2017-2020 as well as the adoption of national humanitarian mine action standards. Unfortunately, most mined areas on the border with Afghanistan during the period of 2015-2017 faced an unstable situation concerning security which prevented operations from taking place and prevented the use of mechanical clearance equipment. Nonetheless, the previous extension request saw Tajikistan established a strong legal framework and strong cooperation between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Mr. Ibrohimov thanked all partners including the UNDP, ICRC and OSCE, NPA and FSD for their strong support and thanked recent and past donors including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Thailand and the United States.

He then shared an update on the current status of Tajikistan's Article 5 Challenge, noting a remaining challenge of 249 mined areas measuring 12,098,210 square metres in three geographical regions of the country: Central Region, Tajikistan Afghanistan border and the Tajikistan and Uzbekistan Border. Tajikistan highlighted that the majority of these mined areas are on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border and have accurate minefield records. Tajikistan shared the impact of anti-personnel landmines on an estimated 500,000 people living in contaminated districts and highlighted the importance of mine action to ensure that local people are able to take advantage of contaminated land for agriculture and pasture and to support inhabitants to return to their land and improve their overall quality of life.

Tajikistan highlighted that during the extension period it intends to address all areas excluding those on the Tajikistan-Uzbekistan border. Tajikistan shared its plan to respond to this challenge, including indicating the need to double its capacity from 90 to 180 deminers to address its remaining challenge by 2025. In support of this effort, Tajikistan will provide 10 additional teams through military authorities. Nonetheless, resources will be required to train and equip these teams. A Concept note has been developed for the provision of equipment which has been attached to Tajikistan's request for extension. Tajikistan indicated that the same methodology would be employed and that it expected similar results in the employment of different methodologies including the addressing of 37% of the remaining challenge addressed through manual clearance, 19% reduced through technical survey and 44% cancelled through non-technical survey. Tajikistan estimates that approximately US\$30 million will be required to implement the plan at a cost of approximately 3.28 USD per square meters. Tajikistan further indicated that the relatively high price is due to the difficulty to access some of the remaining areas which are located in mountainous areas, some of which are 3,000 meters above sea level utilized for pasture and fire wood collection. Tajikistan further indicated the need to carry out survey in the remaining 41 areas on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border measuring approximately 900,041 square meters.

Additional information by Mine Action Actors operating in Tajikistan

Norwegian People's Aid (NPA)

NPA on behalf of all implementing partners provided a series of reflections on Tajikistan's achievements over the past 10 years raising several questions which apply not only to Tajikistan but to the mine action sector as a whole; How can the programme use resources more wisely? How can we strengthen the sector? How can the programme respond to challenges in security and mobilise the political will and commitment at both national and international levels?

NPA indicated that while Tajikistan is not a country that draws headlines such as Iraq and Syria, it is important that States in a position to provide assistance do not forget about programmes that "do things right" such as Tajikistan which provides a good example in terms of the manner in which it is structured within the government with a strong mandate which enables the TNMAC to take a number of important decisions.

NPA indicated that many people are questioning the likelihood of Tajikistan meeting its 2025 deadline. NPA indicated that while the remaining challenges is not necessarily high and while the 2025 deadline can be achieved, the biggest challenge in doing so will be the mobilization of sufficient political will and commitment on the national and international level. Nonetheless, some questions are still to be answered, in particular the extent of contamination on the Tajikistan – Uzbekistan border and in some of the remaining suspected hazardous areas. However, this will become clearer in the next couple of years and Tajikistan will be able to report more clearly and accurately on the situation.

Fondation Suisse de Deminage (FSD)

FSD shared its over 15 years of experience in Tajikistan and highlighted the challenge of the fluctuation in donor funding over the years. FSD mentioned that at the moment donor funding is at such a low level that it only covers 4 or 5 NGO teams with the OSCE, with other funding, covering some extra military teams bringing the number of teams deployed up to 9 or 10. FSD indicated that while Tajikistan is not a high-profile country it is important to support Tajikistan to get to the finish line. FSD further reported that with a bit more funding to cover the cost of 5 or 6 additional teams this could easily be achieved and prevent a situation where we return in five years to request additional time.

FSD further indicated that while the remaining contamination is in a challenging location there is a lot of capacity in Tajikistan including demining kits that are in storage and a number of deminers that are not employed. Should these assets be engaged Tajikistan would be an easy country to take of the list of affected States. FSD further indicated that Tajikistan is a strategically and politically important country and that as the situation on the Tajikistan-Uzbekistan border becomes clearer the need to resolve this matter will only be amplified.

Discussion

Afghanistan noted the warming relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and inquired if this has contributed to any increased collaboration on activities on the border area. Tajikistan indicated that the national entity responsible for border matters and the MFA are working closely on these matters and that MRE in the area started last year. Tajikistan indicated that at the end of 2018 the Tajikistan Border Guard Force and Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited the areas and that they are expecting progress that will be shared once confirmed. Tajikistan further indicated that a plan for addressing contamination on the border area has not been included in the extension request. Participants highlighted the important opportunity to include matters related to anti-personnel mine contamination in discussions concerning delimitation and demarcation of the border.

The United States recognized the progress that had been made and voiced appreciation for the national ownership demonstrated by Tajikistan. Recognizing that Tajikistan has put forward a realistic plan for completion, a minimum of US\$1.5 million has been budgeted for support to Tajikistan in 2019 and will be considered for 2020 and 2021. Tajikistan's progress and commitment, as well as its regional leadership, makes it well placed to receive additional funding.

Norway showed appreciation for Tajikistan's openness and transparency which should support their efforts to mobilize support and cooperation. The low number of donors to the Tajikistan programme is a concern and it is hoped that new donors will come on board as it is important to reward programmes that are carrying out operation in an effective and efficient and evidence-based manner.

The EU indicated that the EU is heavily involved in support to Tajikistan but currently not in the area of mine action. However, the Individualized Approach has provided the opportunity to raise awareness of the matters. The EU indicated that approaching the EU Delegation in Dushanbe would be an important first step for engagement.

The UNDP indicated that not only has Tajikistan made significant progress in the implementation of its mine action commitments, but it provides support to neighbouring countries and asked Tajikistan to provide additional information in this regard. In response, Tajikistan indicate that the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre cooperates with the Afghanistan Mine Action Centre providing support on Quality Assurance and Quality Control of operations carried out on the Afghanistan side of the

border. Additionally, Tajikistan provides, in cooperation with the OSCE, EOD Level 1 training for neighbouring countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia).

In response to the questions posed by the Chair in terms of additional support that could be provided to Tajikistan by organizations and donors. MAG recognized that Tajikistan does not need another actor involved in operation as there is sufficient capacity on the ground. The key is the need for additional funding to support Tajikistan in finalizing its operations.

Tajikistan indicated that it has very good cooperation with the diplomatic corps in Dushanbe. However, participants pointed out that many of the Embassies are not located in Dushanbe. In this regard, any activity or stakeholder dialogue would have to be planned well in advance to allow for maximum participation.

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining indicated that they have supported Tajikistan in the past in their strategic planning efforts and looked forward to continuing this support by supporting them in the development of their new national mine action strategy.

Closing summary and follow up

During closing summary, Tajikistan indicate that it plans to hold an event in the fall to launch a national coordination mechanism, including a visit to a minefield that would be used to raise the profile of mine action in the country and in the region.

Questions about the Mine Action Program in Tajikistan should be directed to:

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