

Ninth Meeting

Geneva, 24 – 28 November 2008

Item 13 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of requests
submitted under Article 5**

**REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF THE DEADLINE FOR
COMPLETING THE DESTRUCTION OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES IN
ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 5 OF THE CONVENTION,
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Submitted by Croatia*

1. With the beginning of conflict in 1991, the Republic of Croatia started facing the mine problem as one of the most difficult consequences of war operations conducted on its territory and became one of many countries worldwide with severe mine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination. Contamination caused and continues to cause humanitarian, economic, developmental and social disturbances. Between 1991 and 1995, 1,280 people were involved in 1,016 mine incidents resulting in 270 deaths. In 1995, the largest number of casualties – 332 persons – was recorded. High numbers of casualties were also recorded in the years immediately prior to entry into force the Convention, with another 337 casualties recorded between 1996 and 1998. Large agricultural areas, parts of infrastructure facilities, forest complexes and river banks remain inaccessible today due to the presence or suspected presence of mines and UXO.

2. The Republic of Croatia confirmed its resoluteness in solving the mine problem by passing the Law on Humanitarian Demining in 1996, establishing the Croatian Mine Action Centre in 1998, fulfilling the commitments undertaken by joining the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction as well as providing for permanent and stable sources of financing in the State budget, in the World Bank loans and from public and private companies in the Republic of Croatia. Croatia ratified the Convention on 28 May 1998 and submitted its initial transparency report on 3 September 1999, providing information on areas that contain or are suspected to contain anti-personnel mines. Croatia has a deadline of 1 March 2009 for destroying or ensuring the destruction of all anti-personnel mines emplaced within these areas.

* Submitted after due date and as soon as received by the Secretariat.

3. Since 1991, Croatia has precisely defined mine suspected areas (MSA), considerably reduced these areas and seen a reduction of mine incidents and number of mine victims. Originally mined areas were located in 14 of Croatia's 21 counties. This has now been reduced to 12 counties. Shortly after entry into force, the total amount of mine suspected areas amounted to over 1,700 square kilometres. Through the application of improved survey methods, this was reduced to 1,147 square kilometres in 2005. The mine suspected area on January 1, 2008 is defined on the surface of 997 square kilometres. Between 1998 and 2007, almost 226,6 square kilometres were demined and over 583 square kilometres were released through technical survey and other land release methods.

4. Demining operations carried out under the auspices of civilian authorities have resulted in 46,430 mines (26,570 anti-personnel mines and 19,860 anti-tank mines) and 202,166 UXO destroyed. At the same time, the Croatian Army destroyed 1,826 anti-personnel mines, 2,473 anti-tank mines and 44,406 pieces of UXO on the area around military facilities. In total, Croatia has destroyed 28,396 anti-personnel mines, 22,333 anti-tank mines and 246,572 UXO.

5. In 2007, there were 8 mine casualties – the lowest annual number since entry into force and a dramatic reduction from 55 casualties recorded in 1999. Croatia has developed sophisticated methods and standards for demining, technical survey, quality assurance and quality control. These methods and standards are based on the International Mine Action Standards, modified in accordance with Croatian national circumstances, and have been established pursuant to a legislative framework for humanitarian demining, which has been codified by the Republic of Croatia. In addition, Croatia has established a method used for cancelling with confidence mine suspected areas, which are ultimately considered not to be dangerous.

6. Croatia has marked all mine suspected areas with over 14,500 warning signs. In addition, it is estimated that over 1,000,000 persons have undergone some form of mine risk education since entry into force. Mine risk education activities continue to be conducted through lectures and presentations, exhibits, TV and radio spots, theatre plays, art workshops, as well as one-time special activities such as selling demining coupons, collecting waste paper, distribution of educational notebooks to all first grade pupils of elementary schools and other projects at the state and local level.

7. Croatia can account for over €317 million having been invested in humanitarian demining activities in Croatia since entry into force. International donors have contributed over €53 million. However, it should be emphasised that Croatia itself has provided the majority of funds for Article 5 implementation in the country, with over €173 having been obtained from Croatia's State budget. In addition, Croatia has been a leader in accessing funds for demining from World Bank and from State and private enterprises.

8. As noted, the estimated total amount of mine suspected area remains 997 square kilometres. This includes 994 square kilometres that have been identified through general survey operations and 3.24 square kilometres reported by the Croatian Army around military barracks, training grounds, warehouses, radar stations and air fields.

9. The circumstances that impede Croatia from complying with its Article 5 obligations within 10 years of entry into force are as follows:

- (a) The breadth of the challenge: At one time the United Nations estimated that there were over 13,000 square kilometres of potentially dangerous area in Croatia. While by 2005 Croatia had, through the application of improved survey methods, had reduced to this 1,147 square kilometres, Croatia has remained one of the States Parties with the greatest amount of area either known or suspected to contain mines.
- (b) Competing demand for resources: Entry into force of the Convention occurred soon after conflict had been concluded in Croatia. War damage was enormous, with cities and villages levelled, communication and utilities infrastructure destroyed and industrial plants unusable. Humanitarian activities were only part of a broader set of reconstruction efforts that had to be undertaken.
- (c) The nature of the mined areas: Conflict resulted in minefields that were not marked and with few useful records of their placement retained. The borders of minefields were not marked and data from minefield records were inaccurate and incomplete. The number of mines was unknown. In addition, mines may have moved due to weather conditions and erosion.
- (d) Environmental challenges: Minefields are uneven and cluttered with obstacles due to the nature of the terrain (mountains, rocky terrains, river banks were used as confrontation lines during the war operations). Furthermore, heavy vegetation has been a major circumstance impeding more rapid progress. Many minefields lie in the type of hot, wet environment that promotes the rapid growth of foliage.
- (e) The need to simultaneously address problems caused by unexploded ordnance: UXO are an integral part of the broader challenge of explosive hazards. Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) requests place additional demands on finite human and financial resources.

10. Croatia is requesting a 10 year extension of its deadline for completing the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas (i.e., until 1 March 2019) on the basis that this is a realistic but not unambitious amount of time given the extent of the remaining problem and the human, materiel and financial resources available or expected, and the demining and survey capacity available.

11. In terms of humanitarian, economic, social and environmental implications, the effort to implement the Convention to date and to more generally address problems associated with explosive remnants of war in Croatia has resulted in a decrease in the number of new victims, facilitated the return of displaced persons and freed land for socio-economic gains. However, humanitarian, economic, social and environmental implications remain and it is expected that these will have been addressed during the extension period

12. Mine suspected areas continue to be found in 112 municipalities in 12 of Croatia's 21 counties. A total of 834,000 inhabitants – 18 percent of the population of Croatia – continue to be affected. Up to 22,000 persons remain refugees or internally displaced. The return of many of these individuals to their homes is affected by the presence or suspected presence of mines.

Mined agricultural areas and forest areas represent a big problem for the economy. The total loss because of mined agricultural areas per year is estimated at €44.0 million, and, according to the Croatian Forest Ltd., the value of wood wealth that can not be used because of mines is €178.0 million. Additional losses flow from the inability to maintain and renew forests. While Croatia has placed a priority on creating safe conditions for tourism, some subsectors continue to be affected, particularly hunting tourism given the nature of remaining mine suspected area. Mine suspected areas account for over 100 square kilometres of national park land or nature reserves.

13. Croatia has a credible plan for fulfilling its obligations by 1 March 2019 with some of the main features as follows:

(a) Croatia has prioritised the remaining mine suspected areas according to: those which affect safety, those which pose barriers to the socio-economic development of Croatia and those which affect the ecology in other ways. While priorities at the operative level will be elaborated in annual demining plans, Croatia has goals of having eliminated by 2010 the mine danger from areas intended for human habitation or for infrastructure, and, by 2013 to have released all areas intended for agriculture.

(b) Croatia has projected that the 410 square kilometres of mine suspected area will be released by demining, 210 square kilometres through general survey and 377 square kilometres through technical survey. Croatia has developed annual timelines for the release of area according to each method. These annual milestones will provide a benchmark for Croatia to report to the States Parties on progress made in implementing Article 5 during the extension period.

(c) On the basis of an analysis of the potential of current capacities, Croatia has projected annual increases in the amount of mine suspected area to be released by demining, from 44 square kilometres to be released in 2008, rising up to 56 square kilometres to be released in 2010.

(d) Given that the majority of mine suspected area can be found in forested area, Croatia will apply the new standing operating procedures it has developed for the general survey of such areas. In applying these procedures along with cancellation practices, Croatia expects to release a significant amount of this area through the determination that it is indeed not a “mined area” as defined by the Convention. Research and development activities will also focus on more rapidly releasing forested areas.

(e) During the realisation of Article 5 implementation efforts during the extension period, Croatia will continue to comply with its obligations under Article 5, paragraph 2, by maintaining marking of all mine suspected areas, replacing existing markings or placing additional markings as required and covering the entire population in mine suspected areas with mine risk education.

14. It is estimated that fulfilment of Article 5 obligations in the Republic of Croatia will cost a total of €740.0 million. Annual projections for funding needs are based on sound formulas regarding extensive experience Croatia has with the real costs for releasing mine suspected areas through the full range of methods (e.g., demining, technical survey, general survey and cancellation). It is expected that the Croatian State Budget will continue to finance the majority

of humanitarian demining activities, with it projected that State funds will increase over time from €44,5 million in 2009 to €59 million in 2012. State funds will be complemented by funds provided by or obtained from other levels of government, State enterprises, European Union pre-accession funds, the World Bank and other financial institutions and domestic and foreign donors.
