

## UN marked Mine Awareness Day in Azerbaijan jointly with villagers and local partners in Borsunlu village situated near ceasefire line

After the commencement of cease-fire in the region, the UN has been helping Azerbaijan in clearing its territory from mines and unexploded ordnance through implementation of Azerbaijan Mine Action Programme - joint project involving the UNDP and the Government of Azerbaijan and executed by Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA).

To highlight the outcomes of the UN-Azerbaijan cooperation in mine action, the UN Department of Public Information Office (UN DPI) in Baku teaming up with International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF), which is one of the partners of ANAMA, marked the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action through conducting an awareness-raising town hall meeting in Borsunlu village of Tartar region located about 48 km from the ceasefire line, 5 hours drive from Baku.



Borsunlu village was not chosen at random. Several days prior to the town hall meeting, a local shepherd was a victim of landmine accident in the village. Hitherto, according to IEPF statistics, between 2004 and 2010, about 15 persons have fallen victims to landmine explosions.



The town hall meeting started with opening remarks from the UN DPI Representative, Ms. Envera Selimovic. She pointed out the efforts made by the UN and the Government of Azerbaijan in eliminating the threats of landmines and explosive remnants of war. "In all parts of the world affected by mines, care for the survivors has been in the focus of the United Nations," Ms. Selimovic stated. While interacting with the local population so as to become familiar with the mine victims' living conditions, Ms. Selimovic informed that, being a witness of the war in her homeland Bosnia, she is well aware of the tragedies caused by landmines and the everyday challenges faced by ordinary people.

Mr. Umud Rahimoghlu, Chairman of IEPF, in his turn, expressed appreciation for the consistent care and support of the UN and informed about the outcomes of cooperation between ANAMA and IEPF in mine action. "ANAMA has cleared an area of 126 million square meters of the territory of Azerbaijan, wherein 7 million square meters belonging to Tartar region have been cleared as result of ANAMA-IEPF collaboration," noted Mr. Rahimoghlu.



Speaking in depth about the activities of the UN in the field of mine awareness and assistance in mine action, Ms. Selimovic emphasized: "We are here to draw broader public attention to the mine action and to the challenges of local population in mine polluted areas." While conveying the UN Secretary-General's message for the Day, Ms. Selimovic highlighted the important aspects of the UN Mine Action:

"Over the past two decades, United Nations assistance in mine action has reached more than 60 countries and territories. In addition to removing landmines and UXOs, efforts in mine action includes developing local capacity, restore the dignity of survivors and building safe environments for civilians, affected communities and United Nation peacekeepers. Such actions make an invaluable contribution to our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals".



Among other awareness-raising activities, demonstration of a film, "UN Mine Awareness Exercises", adapted into the local language by the UN DPI Office, in the village's school building was positively received by the participants including the local deminers. The film screening was followed by an active discussion on the importance and experiences of the UN Mine Action Teams across the globe.



Immediately after the meeting organized in one of the classroom of the village school, Ms. Selimovic was invited to help in setting up the mine awareness billboard at the entrance of Borsunlu village, a village severely affected by landmines as a result of its proximity to cease-fire line.



Also it is worth noting that before arriving in the village, Ms. Envera Selimovic visited Yevlakh located on the way to Tartar and paid a courtesy call at the office of the head of local authority, Mr. Elmar Valiyev. The main reason for the visit was to discuss perspectives of cooperation in conducting Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related outreach activities in the city. Touching upon the importance of the MDG Summit to be held in New York this September, Mr. Valiyev highly appreciated the UN DPI Representative's offer and reaffirmed his support to the UN DPI Office and its national partner IEPF in conducting MDG awareness-raising events in the city in near future. In turn, Ms. Selimovic noted that the role of progressive cities like Yevlakh in Azerbaijan's advancement toward the MDGs is undeniable.



Overall, the DPI Representative's trip to the remote western regions generated a significant impetus for promoting greater public understanding and support for the aims and activities of the United Nations at the national level.

\*\*\*

*On 8 December 2005, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared that April 04 each year would be officially proclaimed and observed as International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. The day was first observed on April 4, 2006.*

Tartar, 02 April 2010