

**Mine Action in Azerbaijan:  
Priorities and needs**

**Quarterly report**

**Mine Action Agency  
of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

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## Executive summary

Azerbaijan is one of the most landmines/explosive remnants of war (ERW) contaminated countries. Indiscriminate use of mines by Armenia continues to cause superfluous injuries and unnecessary suffering to civilians. The number of mine victims in the last 30 years stands at 3,321 persons. Of this number, 242 (as of 31.08.2022) have become mine victims (40 killed and 202 wounded) since the Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020. Mines and ERW also prevents the safe, voluntary and dignified return of forcibly expelled people (IDPs) to their places of origin.

The Government of Azerbaijan has set humanitarian demining as a key priority. The problem for clearance is cost. Despite substantial resources allocated by the Government of Azerbaijan, demining operations still require more funding given the size of the contaminated areas. In light of the scale of the mine contamination, it is impossible for the country to shoulder the demining costs on its own. Azerbaijan is in need of further institutional capacity building, cutting-edge technology, including aerial survey, establishing NGOs to conduct demining and raise awareness building, increasing mechanical demining capacity, setting up female demining teams and improving mine victims' assistance. There is a clear need and opportunity for international donors to play a significant and vital role in increase of the humanitarian mine action capacities in Azerbaijan. The following are deemed to be the key priorities:<sup>1</sup>

- Enhanced planning through the use of data and technology including aerial survey to improve the tasking process.
- Scaling up RAMS capacity.
- Increase the demining capacity through establishment of additional NNGOs accredited to conduct demining.
- Continue to support institutional capacity building of ANAMA.
- Increase ANAMA mechanical demining capacities.
- Further develop Mine Detection Dogs (MDD) training/advising capacity.
- Establish and continuous support to female demining teams.
- Demarcation and permanent fencing.
- Explosive ordnance risk education (EORE).
- Mine victim assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed info on the priorities, please refer to “Key priorities for assistance” chapter

## Background

The massive mine contamination problem in Azerbaijan is the result of military occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia for almost three decades that came to an end with the signing of the November 10, 2020 Trilateral Statement which announced an end to all military activities between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan and envisaged the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from the territory of Azerbaijan.

As a result of the military occupation, Azerbaijan is one of the most landmine/explosive remnants of war (ERW) contaminated countries in the world. Humanitarian demining reveals contamination by a wide range of anti-tank mines (ATM), anti-personnel mines (APM) and ERW (rockets, missiles, artillery projectiles, cluster munitions and others).

## The scope of the mine contamination

The ongoing non-technical and technical survey conducted in the liberated territories reveals that the territories are mine-contaminated, including agricultural fields, graveyards, gardens and other areas of social and economic value.

According to the preliminary data, 147,988 ha are confirmed as high contaminated areas while 675,570 ha are listed as medium and low-level contaminated areas.

**Photo 1. PMN-3 blast wave anti-personnel mine (produced in Armenia). Photo by ANAMA**



**Photo 2. A 152mm artillery shell in the form of an improvised OZM-160-type bounding fragmentation mine. Photo by ANAMA**



Under the international pressure Armenia released some minefield records that provide information about 390,709 anti-tank and anti-personnel landmines as well as other explosive devices. Those records constitute 5% of all the liberated areas and less than third of confirmed high threat areas reflected in UNMAS/UNDP Mine Action Assessment Report of Azerbaijan (December 2020).

However, only some 25% of the minefield records provided by Armenia proven to be reliable. It follows from this that only around 1,25% of the liberated territory has minefield records with reliable data.

Despite November 10, 2020 Trilateral Statement's clear-cut provision on withdrawal of Armenian forces and stopping all military activities, the illegal Armenian forces remaining in Azerbaijan's territories still engage in mine deploying activities.

In the liberated Lachin district, demining operators discovered 1,318 pieces of anti-personnel mines recently planted by the illegal Armenian forces still remaining in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. It was revealed that these were PMN-Յ type mines produced in Armenia in 2021.

**Photo 3. Armenia-produced 2021 year-made landmines recently found in Lachin Photo by Ministry of Defence**



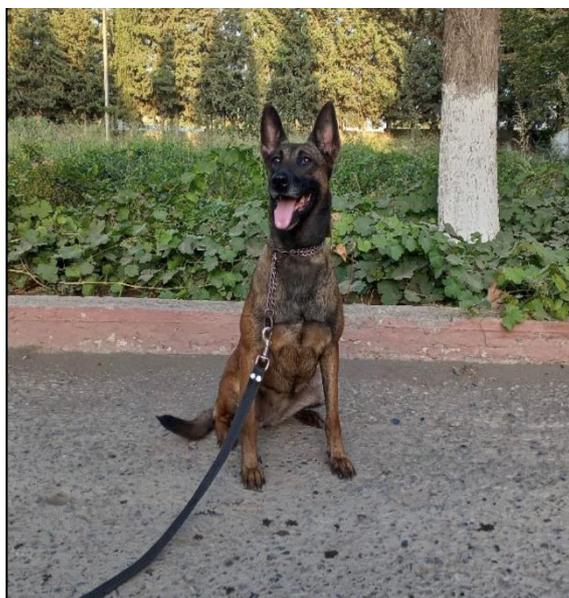
## Mine victims

The situation is aggravated by the fact that mines are indiscriminately deployed beyond the areas covered by the minefield records provided by Armenia while neither marked nor fenced. The number of mine victims in the last 30 years stands at 3,321 persons. Of this number, 242 (as of 31.08.2022) have become mine victims (40 killed and 202 wounded) since the Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020. In total of 140 persons became mine victims as a result of mine explosions in areas not covered by minefield records released by Armenia, which confirms indiscriminate use of landmines.

Such indiscriminate use of mines continues to cause superfluous injuries and unnecessary suffering to civilians. The humanitarian threat caused by mines creates humanitarian urgency that needs utmost attention.

It should also be noted that not only human beings, but also service animals are falling prey to mines. One of the mine detection dogs (MDD) Dina was killed in early September, while searching for the mines/ERWs

**Photo 4. Mine Detection Dog Dina killed by the landmine explosion**



## Mine Action and sustainable development

The Government of Azerbaijan has set mine action as a national priority and mobilized its resources to tackle this humanitarian threat. The areas set for priority clearance are linked to planned rehabilitation and reconstruction work and include areas for infrastructure (highways, railroads, electricity lines), agriculture and settlement construction.

Indiscriminately deployed mines are the main impediment for return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to areas from which they have been forcibly expelled. The nature of the mine and explosive remnants of war problem in Azerbaijan is such that there is a very clear and direct relationship between the outputs of survey and clearance operations and benefits to returnees and the wider socio-economic system including speedy reintegration of the liberated areas into the national economy.

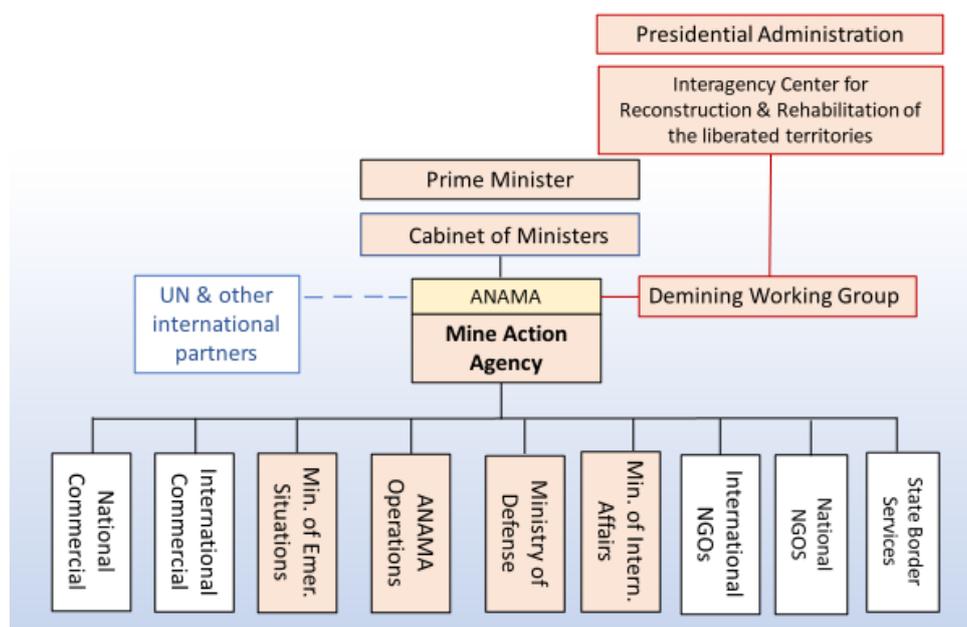
Every area that is released is used for constructing roads, railways, and/or reconstructing towns, villages, schools and the necessary infrastructure of daily life, sometimes as little as a week after demining has completed. It is often said that mine action needs to be mainstreamed into development – in Azerbaijan that has been achieved to an exceptional degree. Humanitarian mine action activities in Azerbaijan serve as drivers of the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals and it will remain that way for the foreseeable future. It is for this very reason humanitarian demining and SDGs have been chosen as a key topic for the international conference held in Azerbaijan in March-April 2022 attended by wide range of demining advocates and activists as well as demining practitioners. It is hoped that this interesting discussion will be continued during the next conference to be held in Azerbaijan in the spring of 2023. It will also be among the topics of another demining forum, Mine Action – Challenges and Opportunities, which is to take place in November, 2022 aiming to bring together demining experts.

### **Institutional overhaul for mine action**

ANAMA is the lead organization responsible for humanitarian demining in the country. It was established in 1998 as a civilian National Mine Action Authority that started its humanitarian demining operations in 2000 to eliminate the socio-economic impact of landmines and ERW.

After the liberation of the territories in the fall of 2020, ANAMA was rebranded by the presidential Decree in February 2021 to also plan, coordinate and oversee humanitarian demining activities of other operators. ANAMA closely works with them to develop common frameworks and approaches to clearance and land release. All demining activities are carried out in line with IMAS. ANAMA is a responsible body to accredit and monitor all mine action operators, including state ones involved in demining process in Azerbaijan.

Chart 1. Mine Action Architecture in Azerbaijan



National Mine Action Requirements have been recently amended and submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers for approval.

Table 1. Operational resources for mine clearance (as of 31.08.2022)

Agencies / companies	Operational staff	Mine detection dogs	Mine clearance machines
ANAMA	838	33	16
Ministry of Defense	450	4	7
Ministry of Emergency Situations	47	6	0
State Border Service	20	0	0
Alpha Demining*	63	5	2
Qaya Safety Solutions*	46	2	1
Safe Point*	79	0	1
Azerbaijan Demining*	34	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,577</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>30</b>

\* local private entities

ANAMA worked out a plan for up-scaling of resources: new demining teams are being established and equipped with tools, mine detection dogs and mechanical demining machines. ANAMA has invested in the Remote Aerial Minefield Survey system with the potential to significantly reduce large scale suspected hazardous areas. The system is providing good data and is proving to be reasonably reliable. However, the major limitation

in the application of this system is presence of tall and/or thick vegetation on the area. Continuous efforts are made to identify and utilize the most advanced solutions.

To further its institutional capacity building and training of its operational staff, ANAMA has been actively working with international partners. In this regard, ANAMA works with UNDP, which aims to provide technical advice, assistance to strengthen operations, and facilitate international networking.

ANAMA also actively works with ICRC, which provides training for ANAMA site paramedics, and Mines Advisory Group (MAG), which provides training and mentoring for ANAMA site supervisors. ANAMA is also thankful to GICHD for the provision of the information management system IMSMA Core as well as relevant assistance and training in the use of the system.

ANAMA also appreciates the provision of EOD level 3+ training course to key field staff by the Government of the UK

### Ongoing demining operations

ANAMA successfully coordinates various activities of several state implementing agencies, NGOs' and commercial contractors in order to execute a work plan elaborated with the involvement of relevant stakeholders and approved by the Government.

From November 10, 2020 till August 31, 2022 ANAMA along with other demining operators has cleared 50,590.3 ha of lands from landmines and ERW. During the demining operations, 23,561 anti-personnel landmines, 11,759 anti-tank landmines and 32,207 pieces of ERW were found and neutralized (the total of 67,527).

To understand the magnitude of the demining task it should be stressed that the area so far cleared from landmines and ERW constitutes around 4% of the overall areas subject for mine action. The work plan for 2022 comprises 40,000 ha of land. The plans for the years ahead foresee further increasing capacity to clear around 65,0000 ha of land annually.

Table 2. Clearance by districts (as of 31.08.2022)

City/town	Total area (sq. km)	Cleared area (sq.km)	ERW	APM	ATM	Total ERW/APM/ATM
Aghdam*	1154	136	7,276	6,842	3,473	17,591
Jabrail	1050	88.6	5,713	3,717	1,588	11,018
Fuzuli*	1390	75.9	13,250	7,607	3,976	24,833
Kalbajar	3054	56.8	396	337	24	757
Lachin**	1835	24.1	47	1,296	33	1,376
Gubadly	802	26.8	302	768	1,298	2,368
Shusha	310	2.3	1,875	51	1	1,927
Tartar**	960	19.1	1,904	2,173	824	4,901
Khojaly**	1000	13.4	239	5	1	245
Khojavand**	1460	19.3	851	6	55	912
Zangilan	707	43.3	242	758	483	1,483
Others		0.3	112	1	3	116
<b>Total</b>		<b>505.90</b>	<b>32,207</b>	<b>23,561</b>	<b>11,759</b>	<b>67,527</b>

\* Not the entire region was previously occupied by the Armenian forces;

\*\* Russian Federation's peacekeepers temporarily deployed in some areas of the region.

**Photo 5. MON-100 type anti-personnel fragmentation mine, remotely activated. Photo by ANAMA**



Led by ANAMA, the demining community in Azerbaijan gains a unique experience by working in a challenging landmine environment and by applying innovative approaches and solutions. While understandably focusing on the current needs of Azerbaijan, this experience offers much needed added-value and can be re-applied in humanitarian demining operations in other parts of the world. In other words, our

country is not simply asking for assistance. While we certainly need support from our

international partners, we are also looking for partnership opportunities as we believe our experience can help other countries facing similar challenges.

Azerbaijan is already sharing its experience in demining putting it in the context of development and socio-economic reintegration and ultimately linking it to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The aforementioned international conference on humanitarian mine action and SDGs held in Azerbaijan at the end of March – early April of 2022 focused on challenges and opportunities of mine action as an enabling activity for humanitarian and development work.

**Photo 6. OZM-72 type anti-personnel bounding fragmentation mine with a plastic body. Photo by ANAMA**



### [Priority for clearance, return of IDPs and planning ahead](#)

As was mentioned above, the priority areas for humanitarian demining are linked to rehabilitation and reconstruction work to enable the safe, voluntary and dignified return of forcibly expelled people (IDP) to their places of origin. As per current planning, 607,100 ha are identified as priority areas for humanitarian demining.

Current plans to enable the safe return of IDPs are foreseen in three stages comprising in total 227 cities, towns and villages. The first stage planned for 2022-2026, envisages around 152,000 persons (37,000 families), who have been living in old dormitories and other poor housing conditions since 1990s, will have the opportunity to return to 83 settlements of Aghdam, Fuzuli, Gubadly, Jabrail, Kalbajar, Khojavand, Lachin, Shusha and Zangilan districts. They lived in these cities before being forcibly expelled by the Armenian separatists. In the years ahead, the second and third stages of the safe, voluntary and dignified return of IDPs is planned drawing from the lessons of the first stage.

The current return plans foresee clearance of 33,795 ha of land for residential areas in all three stages in addition to clearance of additional land for agriculture and infrastructure to support residential areas. The land currently planned for residential areas may undergo further updates.

In line with the first stage, it is envisaged to clear from landmines 14,713 ha of land for construction of residential buildings (houses) in the above-mentioned districts. The clearance for this area should be completed by 2024.

### **Key priorities for assistance**

Looking forward there is a clear need and opportunity for international donors to play a significant and vital role in increase of the humanitarian mine action capacities in Azerbaijan and contribute in further developing the necessary institutional capacity of ANAMA. At the current phase of planning, the following are deemed to be the key priorities:

- **Enhanced planning through the use of data and technology including aerial survey to improve the tasking process.** Application of technology layering such as Geo-spatial, RAMS, and technical survey would assist ANAMA to better define the clearance needs of each task on the national work plan.
- In light of indiscriminate mine contamination, **scaling up RAMS capacity** is needed as a method of gathering the most reliable and up to date data on all conflict affected territories of Azerbaijan.
- **Increase the demining capacity through establishment of additional NNGOs accredited to conduct demining.** NNGOs create locally lead and nationally owned capacity and are able to work in a complimentary alongside but also outside of the national work plan. They could play a vital role in managing a residual risk to support safe repatriation of IDPs.
- **Continue to support institutional capacity building of ANAMA** through provision of technical advice in operational, information and quality management. By stressing the necessity of coordination, Azerbaijan looks forward to working with other partners to this end.

- **Increase ANAMA mechanical demining capacities.** Bespoke demining vehicles are suitable for the wide variety of tasks faced by the demining teams and are proven and capable additional assets particularly where there are obstacles and trenches. The need for demining machines is the following: MV-10s as well as machines with long arm flail/tiller units to adapt to uneven surfaces as well as armored industrial machines (front end loaders, dozers and excavators). Total number of machines required at this stage is 18.
- **Further develop Mine Detection Dogs (MDD) training/advising capacity.** International specialists are needed to keep ANAMA MDDs “competence” up to high level, through establishing proper training procedures and policies and be permanently present on site to assist with MDD program. The requirement will be to provide assistance in deployment of one MDD advisor per each ANAMA regional center for the duration of 12 months.
- **Establish and continuous support to female demining teams.** No women are currently trained for demining. ANAMA have taken the initiative to include females into their expansion plans. The aim will be to support this initiative by assisting in ANAMA institutional capacity building, promoting and supporting gender mainstreaming including through partnership with NNGOs.
- **Demarcation and permanent fencing.** This aims to put in very visible marking and also fencing where required to avoid people from entering hazardous areas and mine migration that may occur during seasonal weather patterns.
- **Explosive ordnance risk education (EORE).** Integration of EORE is a critical component to maximize awareness of the individuals and organizations through various direct and indirect training. Need to enhance awareness raising through mobile applications or other innovative approaches.
- **Mine victim assistance.** With over 3,321 mine victims in Azerbaijan, victim assistance is a priority area for further improvement. ANAMA seeks to strengthen this component through needs assessment of victims and development of an appropriate framework to mobilize resources based on the findings of this assessment.

It is planned to review and update the list of key priorities every three months.

## Impact of international assistance

As international partnership and cooperation are central to the success of mine action, increased international support to Azerbaijan will accomplish a number of important humanitarian and development tasks along with serving regional peace and cooperation.

Accelerated humanitarian demining will reduce number of mine victims currently on the rise, allow speedy rehabilitation and reconstruction to create necessary conditions to enable safe, dignified and voluntary return of IDPs to their places of origin. Providing a safe environment for the voluntary return of more than 800,000 IDPs and ensuring their well-being through the implementation of necessary programmes will be the significant step for the elimination of the consequences of the former conflict also contributing to the regional stability.

Successful demining will facilitate construction and operation of regional rail and road transport links, in perspective, facilitate regional cooperation to the benefit of all involved countries and their populations.

ANAMA stands ready to actively engage with potential donors and organizations interested to contribute to mine action in Azerbaijan. Moreover, ANAMA actively participates in international landmine-related events and contributes to exchange of experience and best-practices.

## Upcoming events

Two international demining conferences will be organized in Azerbaijan within the next 12 months.

The first one, “Mine Action – Challenges and Opportunities”, is to take place in November, 2022 aiming to bring together demining experts and practitioners.

The second one tentatively scheduled for the spring of 2023 is to continue discussions started in Azerbaijan earlier this year during the conference focusing on the humanitarian demining and SDGs.