

Comments on Tajikistan's Extension Request, 4th Review Conference, 25-29 November 2019

Since Tajikistan presented its last extension request ten years ago, its suspected area of contamination has increased significantly and Tajikistan still needs to establish an accurate, evidence-based baseline of contamination. In addition, the current plan excludes release of mined areas on the Tajik-Uzbek border area and the remaining projections are based on the imminent doubling of the existing capacity, for which funding has not been secured. We trust that Tajikistan takes urgent action to redouble its capacity and to reinforce the international community's confidence in Tajikistan's clearance program. Indeed, we want nothing less than Tajikistan free of mines by 2025.

Among positive points of the request, we see the following:

- Subsequent to Tajikistan submitting its Article 5 extension request, and following on from the individualized approach meeting on Tajikistan in the margins of the 2019 Intersessional meetings, Tajikistan has established an in-country Mine Action Forum, led by the national authorities and bringing together all key stakeholders, partners and donors. We welcome this development and look forward to updates on its further work.
- Seven districts have become mine-free in the course of work under the latest extension request plan
- Tajikistan and Uzbekistan agreed for a joint commission to investigate minefields along the Tajik-Uzbek border and to schedule their clearance
- Tajikistan has taken some steps to increase its demining capacity with the support of the Ministry of Defense and NPA, as well as through engagement with the Treaty's Committee on Cooperation and Assistance. These include plans to increase much needed survey capacity and to establish a survey technical working group, with members from all key stakeholders.
- Tajikistan has a fairly clear plan for areas in the Central Region and the Tajik- Afghan border, disaggregated by the region, type of work, area to be addressed, and year.

Among points of concern that will require further attention and follow-up, we see the following:

- Tajikistan still does not know exactly what remains to be done with thirty areas remaining to be surveyed. We note that Tajikistan recognizes that its survey capacity is insufficient and urge Tajikistan to firm up its plans to

significantly expand survey capacity for the early period of the extension period. Tajikistan needs to do all it can to ensure the survey is completed as soon as possible!

- The extension request excludes the Tajik-Uzbek border and does not contain a plan to address this area. This is indeed at odds with the decision on forming the joint border commission. Tajikistan needs continue working closely on securing timely survey and clearance of the border area with Uzbekistan to be completed by 2025, and provide regular updates to States Parties in this regard.
- The annual projections in Tajikistan's extension request are simplistic, and the total cost and budget needed for implementation of the workplan is unclear and includes a number of discrepancies. We trust Tajikistan will be able to establish more accurate projections and timelines soon.
- The requested deadline of December 2025 to complete clearance is extremely optimistic. It is based on doubling the current capacity, funding for which has not yet been secured, whereas the presented plan assumes that the increased capacity will be fully operational from 2020. Without the doubling of capacity it seems unlikely Tajikistan will meet the 2025 deadline. Tajikistan needs to urgently undertake significant resource mobilization efforts and take immediate steps to secure international funding required to fulfill its obligations under Art. 5
- Tajikistan should commit to provide regular updates to States Parties on implementation of its workplan, adjusting it according to the actual survey and clearance output achieved, and available capacity.
- Lastly, the inconsistent use of terminology and means of quantification of the problem (interchangeable use of district-province-area without specifying whether it is SHA, CHA or 'area' in a more general sense) adds to further lack of clarity and to obscuring the actual results of the work on the land release. The Tajikistan National Mine Action Center should aim to improve its land release terminology and methodology, to make it more consistent with IMAS.