

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 the United Kingdom

14 November 2008

1. The only mined areas under the jurisdiction and control of the United Kingdom are located in the Falkland Islands.
2. The United Kingdom seeks an extension for the maximum period of 10 years. This is based on the estimated time period for any de-mining operation as set out in table one of the Executive Summary of the Falkland Islands Field Survey carried out by Cranfield University. This reflects the complexities of de-mining in the Falkland Islands. It was not possible to initiate a de-mining programme until the Feasibility Study on the clearance of landmines in the Falkland Islands was completed. This was concluded in October 2007.
3. The United Kingdom is now actively considering the options for clearance that it set out. The Falkland Islands residents were regularly consulted while the Feasibility Study was being carried out and any future decisions will be made in consultation with the Falkland Islands Government.
4. During the conflict in 1982, a number of minefields were laid in the Falkland Islands; a UK overseas territory. The Argentine Government has reported to the United Nations that some 20,000 antipersonnel mines and 5,000 anti-vehicle mines were taken to the islands by its armed forces.
5. Approximately 1855 mines have been removed and destroyed from the mined areas since the conflict. In addition stockpiles containing approximately 3000 mines were destroyed immediately after the conflict.
6. We estimate that just over 20,000 mines of both types (anti-personnel mines and anti-vehicle mines) remain within the mined areas. 117 mined areas remain (including 4 areas that are only suspected of containing mines) that in total cover just over 13 sq kilometers; this represents only 0.1% of land used for farming. The mined areas cover a wide range of terrain including sandy beaches and dunes, mountains, rock screes, dry peat, wet swampy peat, and pasture land. Some of these areas are very isolated and have no access tracks for even 4 wheeled vehicles; these can only be accessed by specialist track vehicles at present.
7. As stipulated in Article 5.2 of the Convention all 117 areas have been perimeter-marked and are regularly monitored and protected by quality stock proof fencing, to ensure the effective exclusion of civilians. This minimises the threat to the civilian population. The active engagement of a UK Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) detachment during regular monitoring to intercept mines that may become a problem,

reduces the hazards significantly and the possible impact on the community is continually reduced. With no civilian casualty to anti-personnel mines in over 25 years, we judge that the humanitarian impact is negligible. That said, Mine Risk Education (MRE) continues for military and civilians on the island to keep mine awareness a key part of normal Health and Safety considerations.

8. In 2001, UK and Argentina agreed to carry out a joint feasibility study on the clearance of landmines in the Falkland Islands. The Resilience Centre of Cranfield University was selected by the two Governments to carry out certain tasks of the Feasibility Study, including a field survey of the Falkland Islands. The report highlighted the environmental and remediation challenges, the climatic constraints and the limitations of the existing local infrastructure and recommended a two year trial. This trial would assess the suitability of various mine clearance equipments and techniques for both clearance and confidence building measures, assess the optimal mix of techniques and equipment in each mined area, assess the environmental impact of each of the clearance options and examine the range of options of peat remediation that may be appropriate for each clearance technique. Cranfield University concluded that the clearance of mines from all mined areas would be challenging, but technically possible and estimated that the task would take a minimum of 10 years subject to the outcome of the trial.
9. As our request makes clear in contrast to other mine-affected areas in the world the humanitarian and social-economic impact of the mined areas in the Falkland Islands is negligible, and therefore there are no negative implications if an extension were to be granted.
10. In a statement made on 9 May 2008 the Falkland Islands Government expressed satisfaction that “all mined areas are safely fenced, and present no long term social or economic difficulties for the Falklands.” Indeed, the Falkland Islanders have expressed concern about the negative socio-economic impact a de-mining operation would have with: a) the disruption and strain on the infrastructure of their small community caused by an influx of a large number of de-miners and heavy machinery for an extended period of time; and b) the interference to their growing tourist industry and the negative economic impact this would have (tourism is one of the three major industries on the Island).
11. The Feasibility Study highlighted the serious environmental damage to the Islands fragile eco-system that any de-mining operation will have and the major remediation that will be required. In their May statement the Falkland Island Government made clear that they would “have to pay close attention to the environmental implications of complete clearance.”
12. The environmental, technical and geographical challenges that the Falkland Islands present for clearance mean that a de-mining operation is going to be a comparatively expensive one, costing millions of pounds. The Falkland Islanders are aware of this and in their May statement they conclude, “we would prefer the money to be spent on removing landmines from needier parts of the world.” As further background the UK attached to its request for extension, the Feasibility Study on clearance of landmines in the Falkland Islands, the Field Survey carried out by Cranfield University as part of this study and the Falkland Islands Government statement of 9 May.

13. The clearance of all mined areas will be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the planning process under forthcoming Falkland Islands domestic law. There are technical difficulties preventing a straight forward EIA because it is almost impossible to make an assessment of the impact until there is knowledge of the minefield contents and an assessment of the clearance methodology. To do this, a technical survey will need to be carried out on each of the mined and suspect areas followed by the EIA. The EIA will have to establish the need for the project and any feasible alternatives; implementation of international/national/local legislation, regulations and planning guidance such as biodiversity and geological conservation, previous scoping and consultation, and other options/alternatives. In consultation with the Falkland Islands Government the UK will make its decisions based on the criteria set out in the Table C4 (table on environmental implications contained in the request).