

ICBL comments on the Extension Request by Bosnia and Herzegovina

ISC meetings, 30 June – 2 July 2020

Thank you, Mr. Chair,

This is Bosnia and Herzegovina's third extension request, following a two-year interim extension from March 2018 – March 2021. This current extension request is for a period of 6 years until March 2027. While we regret it is beyond 2025, we truly hope that it will be the last extension request required by Bosnia and Herzegovina. After some 30 years of mine action effort with significant donor support it will be indeed time for Bosnia and Herzegovina to be finally free of mines.

It is regrettable to read that there was a delay in the application of the 2018-2025 National Strategy partly due to a delay of 6 months to appoint the Demining Commission, which also disrupted progress in clearance and survey. The projected targets for cancellation and clearance during the interim request period were only partially met at 35% and 38% respectively. It is hoped that some of this lost time and momentum can be regained to bring the plan back on track.

Among the positive points in the extension request we note the following:

- The submission of the extension request, while late, is just in time for the Intersessional Meetings to allow comments to be submitted and the Committee on Article 5 to work with BiH to strengthen its request.
- It is commendable to see the progress arising from the Country Assessment of Suspected Hazardous Areas Project and the general effort towards sharing accurate data regarding the actual extent of contamination and the subsequent prioritization and clearance of the identified Confirmed Hazardous Areas.
- It is also commendable to see the progress that has been made under the Mine Action Governance and Management Project.
- It is noted that national funds will be used to fund NTS conducted by BHMAL and the Armed Forces.

However, there are several points that require further clarification and work, including:

- There is some confusion regarding numbers within the extension request relating to amount of land cancelled and amount of land remaining to be cleared. On page 5 of the request it is noted that "the project led to the cancellation of 966,686,956 m² (966km²)". However, on page 7 it is noted that the SHA project led to a reduction of affected areas from 1,061,241,360m² (1,061km²) to 966,686,956m² (966km²). The actual amount of land reduced during the 2-year interim extension is therefore 94,55,274m² (9.45km²). These numbers need to be rectified in the extension request to provide the correct figures of the

amount of land cancelled and reduced and the amount of land remaining to survey and clear.

- Under Section 4, it is stated that the 6 years of the extension request will enable Non-Technical Survey and Technical Survey to better define the precise perimeter of mined areas. Bosnia and Herzegovina need to state clearly that the purpose of the extension request is not only to conduct survey, but to remove the mines from the identified CHAs and to fulfill its treaty obligations by the end date. Close management and balance of survey and clearance resources will be necessary to achieve completion.
- While some delays such as the Covid 19 pandemic and weather are outside of the control of a demining program, it should be noted that some delays, such as that to appoint the Demining Commission, are within control and are regrettable when they hold up progress.
- An operational and finance plan is included in the request, including national funds to be provided to BHMIC and funds required through other sources. However, the plan is for the period 2021-2025. Bosnia and Herzegovina need to present a more detailed operational and finance plan for the full period of the extension request until March 2027.
- There is an inconsistency in the presentation of victim numbers for the period 2009 – 2019 which should be corrected. The numbers vary between totals of 128, 136 and 138, although it appears 138 is the correct number.
- The request contains a lot of information about the Mine Risk Education program which focuses on school and access to children and the design of a mine awareness mobile application, demonstrating the application of innovation. However, given that 95% of victims are adult men, it would be useful for Bosnia and Herzegovina to clarify how specific high-risk groups will be targeted.

In closing, we call on Bosnia and Herzegovina to tackle its remaining contamination with the sense of urgency it requires. We hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina will ensure that the clarifications are made regarding the amount of land released and the remaining land to be addressed. Within the review of the Mine Action Strategy it will be prudent for BiH to consider a strategic goal reflecting the completion of the treaty clearance obligations (for good) by 2027.