

ICRC Statement

Turkey's Extension Request

Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies

28 May 2013

The International Committee of the Red Cross would like to commend Turkey for submitting a well-articulated extension request, which contains the most information ever presented to the States Parties about the mined areas in Turkey.

The ICRC hopes that an 8-year extension of time will be the maximum period required by Turkey to fulfil its Article 5 obligations. Clearance operations might actually take less time than predicted as Turkey fortunately possesses a lot of precise information about its mined areas in the form of "mine registries" that will greatly facilitate clearance efforts.

By any standards, the pace of clearance in Turkey since entry into force has been unduly slow, with only 1.15km² being cleared over the past 9 years. We take the opportunity to recall the undertaking of all States Parties under Article 5, "to destroy ... all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible" and trust that the extension request will bring new energy and commitment to fulfilment of this undertaking.

Turkey's extension request refers to mined areas on the Syrian border, its Eastern borders and "areas other than borders". Concerning the mined areas on the Syrian border, the ICRC is very pleased that Turkey is proceeding with the tender process, and that it will fund the clearance operations from its national budget. We trust that by the 13MSP, the selection process will be complete and that Turkey will be in a position to provide the States Parties with annual milestones for clearance, against which it should report in the following years. Subject to the evolving security situation, we consider that 42 months is a reasonable timeframe for clearance once the contracts are signed.

In regards to the mined areas on the Eastern borders, we urge both Turkey and the European Union to make all efforts to ensure that clearance begins as planned. Once the tender process is complete in 2015, Turkey should submit a detailed work plan with annual milestones. During the extension period, it should also keep the States Parties informed of funding strategies for the third phase of the clearance programme, for which funding has not yet been secured.

Turning to the 704 "areas other than borders", which we understand are primarily around military installations, we find the estimated timeframe of 8 years for clearance of these areas excessively long. We urge Turkey to overcome the bureaucratic and legal hurdles to enable the creation of a National Mine Action Authority and National Mine Action Centre earlier than the expected timeframe. In the meantime, military deminers trained in humanitarian demining should be able to proceed with clearance of these areas. Based on technical advice the ICRC has received, clearance of these areas could be completed in as little as two years, unless, as Turkey has indicated today, it is unsafe for deminers to continue in some of these 704 areas.

In its extension request, Turkey has mentioned another 356 "suspected" mined areas, where accidents have occurred. The request does not contain any plan to survey these areas, which would be necessary to complete Turkey's request.

Finally, the ICRC is concerned by the order of priorities for clearance of “areas other than borders”, which suggests that areas of benefit to the local population (in terms of agriculture and animal breeding) will be the lowest priority, after the clearance of “areas used for military operations”, and “areas with little or no risk of terror attacks”. We would like to know the basis for this order of priorities and what is being done to reduce the potential impact of mined areas on the population pending clearance.

In sum, the ICRC regrets that the remaining land to be addressed in Turkey is still substantial, almost 9 years after entry into force. Turkey has expressed a commitment to completing its Article 5 obligations and has now taken action towards starting clearance of many of those areas. It now needs to greatly improve its rate of clearance, survey additional suspected areas, and ensure it uses all possible means, including military deminers, to get the job done.