



REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

STATEMENT ON ARTICLE 5  
OF THE MINE BAN CONVENTION

Standing Committee Meeting  
Geneva, April 2007

Dear Co-chairs,  
Distinguished Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to address this April Meeting of the MC Standing Committee on behalf of the Government of Tajikistan. This is just another manifestation of our long-term commitment to the principles and goals of the Convention. Indeed Tajikistan can be viewed as the only Member State of Central Asia that has effectively sought for fostering a mine-free space.

This year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention's adoption. Anniversary dates are always an occasion for reflecting, summing up results and formulating plans for the future. In these ten years we note the Ottawa Convention indeed has made notable strides in promoting a mine free world by expanding its mandate and extending its reach.

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Mr. Co-chair,

In reflecting Tajikistan's record of the Article 6 obligations implementation I will be most specific.

Tajikistan's Mine Action Program is currently implemented in accordance with the National Five Year Mine Action Strategy and under this plan we intend to increase our productivity and efficiency in 2007 and beyond. The amendments to the Strategic Plan were approved on July, 27 2006 by National Commission on Implementing International Humanitarian Law.

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Our principal objectives for the nearest years include:

- **Reducing impact of landmines on poor communities.**
- **Doubling productivity and efficiency of mine clearance in comparison to 2006.**
- **Completing by 2008 mine clearance operations in priority areas of High and Medium risks.**
- **Creating proficient, credible and trained national personnel seeking national mine action program management by the end of 2007.**
- **Increasing Mine Risk Education and Victims' Assistance activities.**

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In 2006 we managed to clear 307,3 thousand m<sup>2</sup> area, identify and destroy 1101 mine and 56 UXOs.

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In August 2006 we were able to deploy mine detecting dog teams which have been trained at the Afghan MDD Training Centre in Kabul. Deployment of mine detecting dog teams and the improvement of the program management allowed us to double productivity and cost-efficiency of mine clearance. OSCE supported establishing Mine Detection Dogs Training Centre in Dushanbe while Tajik Ministry of Defence provided relevant in-kind assistance (training field).

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It should be noted that with general survey operations still in progress, we estimate that more than 25 km<sup>2</sup> of mine contaminated lands are still in place in Tajikistan. Since the commencement of demining activities in Tajikistan, our teams have so far cleared an area of more than 500 000 m<sup>2</sup>. With only three years before Tajikistan's treaty deadline a simple glance at these figures allows to draw unambiguous conclusions.

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Achieving progress on this issue largely depends on a number of factors. Apart from the need to increase capacity and productivity, one of the topical issues in our mine clearance agenda relates to budget shortages. *Inadequate and untimely funding on the part of donors are stumbling block in the implementation of assumed obligations.* For example, currently, Tajikistan sees the commencement of the demining season; however, due to the lack of funds only two mine clearance teams have been deployed. We are not able even to begin training programs pursuing the creation of new survey and mine clearance teams.

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We suppose that an introduction of mechanical demining machine(s) is expedient in increasing productivity and cost-effectiveness. Seeking the acquisition of these machine(s) appropriate fund raising projects have been drawn up and submitted to donors, but regrettably we have not received any positive feedback on this matter so far. Of course, as usual, our plans depend on generosity of donors. We are hopeful that required funding will be resumed as soon as possible, considering our seasonal limitations.

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Mr. Co-chair,

I can not help but to bring the attention of the audience to another pressing issue challenging our compliance capabilities, which is exacerbated by the character of our long-standing demining disputes and interactions with neighboring Uzbekistan. This issue remains to be of grave concern to the people of Tajikistan!

We regret to admit lack of any substantive progress on this issue since 2006. Uzbekistan's inexplicable practice of unmarked and spontaneous mining in border areas, allegedly aimed against infiltration of international terrorists, had resulted in continued civilian casualties and many other repercussions. This problem is compounded and linked, as we believe, to our interstate negotiations on delineation and demarcation of the border. By now none of the disputed area has seen demarcation. Despite our repeated appeals and diplomatic initiatives Uzbekistan demonstrated reluctance to engage in a search for a mutually satisfactory solution to the mine issue as well as disregarded our calls for handing over maps of mine fields and official records of clearances conducted, if any. Mine-affected border areas have turned into a kind of a "black hole" for local Tajik community.

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We call upon Uzbekistan to finally respond adequately to our grave concerns and we address international community to reinforce its political efforts in encouraging Uzbekistan to cooperate more effectively in insuring comprehensive demining in border areas. Unquestionably, addressing insecurity challenges in mine-suspected areas is largely a matter of political will on the part of Uzbekistan's leadership. Our diplomacy on both bilateral and multilateral tracks spares no efforts on promoting mine clearance and we shall continue to do so. Unquestionably, fostering a full-fledged common

security space by lifting up dividing lines in Central Asia, embracing norms and principles of cooperative approach is in line with vital interests of both states and prosperity of the region.

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Although economic situation and level of economic development in Tajikistan prevents national government from assigning significant funds to the mine action program at the moment, government contributions to the program are increasing each year. The national mine action program in Tajikistan functions in responsive and favourable environment. Currently, the Government of Tajikistan provides sufficient technical assistance. Last year, the Government's assistance accounted for about 500 000 USD, which is 200 000 USD more than in the previous year. It provides relevant in-kind support, in particular, buildings and facilities, necessary training materials and ammunitions, a helicopter standing by permanently whenever the need for victim's evacuation from a mine field arises (last year the helicopter was twice used for victim's evacuation). Apart from this, the ministries of defence and emergency situations, and the National Border Guards provide human resources on a free-of-charge basis. This year, involvement of the National Guards' personnel in demining has been agreed upon. The national TV and radio broadcasting stations air mine action messages and film spots without charge; mine action equipment and supplies imported into the country enjoy tax relief and duty-free status and some other procedures have been simplified.

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It is the fourth year that Swiss Foundation for Mine Action has been taking the lead in mine clearance operations in Tajikistan, though all the deminers are local personnel. We value the significant inputs of FSD. We

believe that over the last period local specialists have managed to acquire sound working experience and expertise and we emphasize that relevant national human resources have been trained and supported by our colleagues in FSD seeking nationalisation of mine action program management. And that of course it should be paralleled with continued use of expatriate specialists and advisors.

Currently, discussions between Tajikistan's Mine Action Centre, FSD, UNDP, OSCE and relevant governmental structures are in progress regarding the way and stages of transferring of responsibilities and management of operations to national authorities. We realize that this process requires care, accuracy, and thorough assessment of all consequences of the handover and program management operations responsibility.

Within the cooperation between ministries and agencies involved discussions are taking place regarding setting up a national agency, replacing FSD. By 2008 we anticipate the completion of demining management nationalisation process.

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In the context of international cooperation Tajikistan demand lies in the following emergency support:

- Additional funding, specifically for finalising "Completion Initiative" strategy (funding required accounts to 10-12 mln USD);
- mechanical demining machine(s)
- ensuring increasing support of victims assistance projects
- continued participation of our staff in various special courses and experience exchange programs seeking capability building.

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Mr. Co-Chair,

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to thank all donor community and international organizations involved for crucial support toward the Mine Action in Tajikistan during these years and voice our hopes that this support will be further extended effectively.

Thank you for your attention.