

**Ninth Meeting**  
**Geneva, 24-28 November 2008**  
Item 13 of the provisional agenda  
**Consideration of requests submitted  
under article 5**

**REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF THE DEADLINE FOR COMPLETING  
THE DESTRUCTION OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES IN ACCORDANCE  
WITH ARTICLE 5 OF THE CONVENTION**

**Submitted by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela\***

1. Pursuant to article 5.1, each State Party “undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than ten years after the entry into force of this Convention for that State Party”. This paragraph is related to the provision in article 5.3, which stipulates that: “If a State Party believes that it will be unable to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines referred to in paragraph 1 within that time period, it may submit a request to a Meeting of the States Parties or a Review Conference for an extension of the deadline for completing the destruction of such anti-personnel mines, for a period of up to ten years.”
2. In the 1990s, the Government of Venezuela, following the attack on the Naval Post “AF. Manuel Echevarría (Cararabo, Estado Apure) by alleged irregular forces operating on the border with the Republic of Colombia, on 25 February 1995, scattered 1,074 mines in 13 mined areas around six naval posts: Guafitas, Isla Vapor, Río Arauca, San Fernando de Atabapo, Puerto Páez and Cararabo, covering an area of 18 hectares. Owing to geographical, environmental and climatic factors, as well as technical factors, the tasks of humanitarian demining have not yet begun. Nevertheless, since the anti-personnel mines were laid responsibly,

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\* Submitted after due date and as soon as received by the Secretariat.

being identified and enclosed, there are no humanitarian, economic, social or environmental implications. So far only one accident has occurred as a result of carelessness on the part of a soldier.

3. Venezuela, through its staff of Combat Engineers and Explosives Experts, has already destroyed 47,189 mines that were stockpiled in various arsenals in the country, thereby showing its commitment to the established rules and faithfully implementing the terms of article 4 of the Ottawa Convention.

4. In addition, Venezuela maintains a deposit of 4,960 AP mines for the purpose of using them for the development of mine detection, mine clearance and mine destruction techniques and to provide training in these techniques for specialized personnel assigned to these important tasks, in accordance with the terms of article 3 (Exceptions) of the Ottawa Convention.

5. The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has requested a five-year extension to carry out the humanitarian mine clearance activities, with an estimated budget of 30 million bolívares fuertes (BsF 30,000,000), equivalent to approximately 13.97 million United States dollars, assuming all costs arising from the mine clearance activities, and assigning the necessary resources in accordance with the country's annual budget projection and planning.

6. Research activities and studies have been conducted in order to achieve steady progress in the area of mine clearance, with the implementation of a Geographical Information System that will provide detailed access to actual location, size and other characteristics of the mined areas, using geographical and personal data designed for the efficient capture, storage, updating, handling, analysis and display of all forms of referenced geographical information.

7. Venezuela, through the Ministry of the People's Power for Defence (Naval Component), regularly appoints technical teams who carry out periodic inspections to check the state of naval posts situated in the vicinity of minefields. A clear picture is drawn up of the situation of each post, including the precise definition of mined areas, the identification of limits for the transit of personnel, and ensuring clear markings and delimitations of the minefields, despite the presence of dense and abundant vegetation in the areas where the mines were placed, which prevents observation of internal points of reference allowing the use of access corridors.

8. The task of humanitarian mine clearance is organized under the authority of the Ministry of the People's Power for Defence, which operates through the General Coordination of Mine Clearance Courses and Works, the body responsible for administering and implementing the national accreditation system that carries out a Quality Control subsequent to removal. This body is also in charge of coordinating the activities of all organizations (including government, NGOs, military and commercial organizations) responsible for implementing mine clearance projects or tasks. At present the unit consists of five persons, all high-ranking officers with advanced acknowledged expertise in the area of mine clearance.

9. A National Demining Structure is to be set up, with the participation of the Sixth Corps of Army Engineers "Gran Mariscal de Ayacucho G/J Antonio José de Sucre", the Naval Engineers Corps, the National Armed Forces Armament Directorate (DARFA) and the Armament Directorates of the various components, in order to combine efforts for the effective and rapid implementation of mine clearance work in the country.

10. For mine clearance work in the areas under its jurisdiction and supervision, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will use specially trained and qualified national military personnel, who, in compliance with international mine clearance standards, will employ manual demining techniques, the canine detection technique, and the demining technique with heavy equipment, in order to ensure the internal quality and certification of the cleared areas.

11. In order to ensure that operations are coordinated and safe, consideration is currently being given to introducing Mine Clearance Operating Procedures Handbooks in pursuit of the planned objectives, establishing guidelines complying with international humanitarian mining standards, which cover techniques, mapping, removal, marking, post-removal documentation and community coordination for mine clearance activities.

12. Three main operating levels have been defined to carry out the demining work programme, as follows:

(a) **Level I:** General reconnaissance. Operational and strategic planning. Support for population and local authorities;

(b) **Level II:** Based on the results of the Level I study, undergrowth clearance (chemical method) and inspection of the equipment and installation of personnel in areas adjacent to minefields;

(c) **Level III:** If the results of Level II are positive, sweeping 100 per cent of the marked field, ACI certification.

13. The affected Naval Posts in the Low Plains (Llanos Bajos) region of Venezuela are located in an area of flood plains. The main problems arise from an annual accumulation of excess water originating from rainfall and from the flooding of stream and rivers, due to the build-up effect produced by the increased flow of large waterways.

14. The minefields of the Naval Post of San Fernando de Atabapo, on the other hand, are situated in an enclave of tropical rainforest humid all year round, with vegetation up to 1.50 metres. This allows full observation of the minefields, but the sectors where the anti-personnel mines are located are exposed to heavy flooding (80 per cent for much of the year).

15. These border naval posts where the minefields are located are situated in frontier areas that are being constantly watched by irregular Colombian groups, who present a constant threat to the security of military and civil personnel in the region. As a result, despite the fact that the fields are marked out in accordance with established safety standards, the removal and destruction of mines is extremely dangerous, since personnel and equipment must be transferred in conditions of maximum security in order to avoid leaving the experts designated for the task defenceless and at risk.

16. The minefields were laid in order to give protection to frontier naval posts, consciously, with markings and a detailed record of the mines' location, ensuring that their whereabouts are known to the military staff in charge of the security and defence of the country at those posts. Civilian populations in the area are in no way exposed to any danger, since the area is very remote; there is no agriculture nearby because the areas are inhospitable, difficult of access and with the sort of vegetation and topography that prevent any habitation in the vicinity.

17. Nevertheless, during the Assurance of Internal Quality (ACI) process, a sampling of neighbouring areas is to be carried out with a view to identifying other possible areas that could place the lives of personnel or the civilian population at risk.
18. The task of destroying or ensuring the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in areas under the jurisdiction or control of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will be carried out from October 2009 to October 2014 (five years).
19. Destruction work in the minefields will be carried out mainly between the months of February and June, because these are the dry months when work is possible in these areas. For most of the year they are under heavy rainfall, which leads to flooding and makes access very difficult.
20. The year 2008 is being spent by Venezuela carrying out administrative, research, study and planning tasks in preparation for the demining work, including restructuring and evaluating the Mine Clearance Operating Procedures Handbooks in order to adapt their content to the desired objectives, and planning the assignment of the economic resources needed for the demining work in coordination with government bodies and the State's budgetary authorities.
21. Plans have also been made for the acquisition of machinery, which will be put out to tender. This machinery will be used to facilitate work in the minefields, in accordance with the rules and procedures of the Venezuelan legal system.
22. Even if this equipment is not purchased, however, Venezuela will still complete all the necessary works, using whatever mechanical techniques may be necessary, for the destruction of the anti-personnel mines.
23. In 2009, specialized personnel will be recruited to carry out the mine clearance tasks. These will be registered with the National Demining Structure and in the course of the year they will be retrained and prepared in the use of the new equipment and techniques necessary for the mine clearance work, after carrying out reconnaissance and planning tasks at the border naval posts, organizing operations and the required logistics.

24. During the months of February, March, April and May of the year 2010, the plan is to undertake the first destruction of all three minefields situated at the Puerto Páez Naval Post. The work can be carried out only at that time of year, since otherwise local flooding and environmental factors make the work impossible. This particular Naval Post was given preference because it offers better conditions of access and transport.

25. In the course of November and December 2010, if atmospheric and climatic conditions permit, the plan is to carry out the destruction of all three minefields of the Guafitas Naval Post, taking advantage of the operations conducted nearby in Puerto Páez, which would facilitate speedier progress with the work and greater efficiency. In addition it is one of the posts with the smallest quantity of mines laid.

26. Later, in February 2011, destruction work should begin on the minefields located at the San Fernando de Atabapo Naval Post, situated in the State of Amazonas, which starting in February offers the best atmospheric, climatic and environmental conditions for mine clearance operations.

27. In January 2012, destruction work on anti-personnel mines will begin at the Rio Arauca Naval Post. This is one of the areas worst affected by floods because it is situated at the confluence of the large river of the same name. Time is needed to dry out the ground in order to offer the right conditions for mine clearance operations, so that it takes more time for the operations themselves and for logistical and personnel maintenance.

28. The three minefields of the Cararabo Naval Post can be totally destroyed early in 2013, once the period of heavy rain is over in the area, so that the quality standard can be achieved and the area can be certified.

29. Last of all, because it is the post where access routes are completely impassable at the time of heavy rains and river flooding, leaving access only by air, the Naval Post of Isla Vapor will be cleared. The plan is to destroy the only minefield in the area starting in February 2014. Nevertheless, it is the most difficult terrain to operate in, since the mines have probably moved and may now be located deeper down, owing to sedimentation from the river floods, so that existing references may prove useless.

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