

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,
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Submitted by Thailand

I. Origins of landmine problem

1. Mined areas in Thailand are mostly found along Thailand's borders with its neighbours, especially along its border with Cambodia. The two main causes of landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination are: Cambodia's internal conflict, which featured many Cambodian factions fighting along the Thai-Cambodian border, and, the 1965-1981 conflict between the Thai government and communist insurgents, especially in northern Thailand. Even though these conflicts ended over a decade ago, millions of explosive remnants still present an ever threat to the security and economy of local communities in the affected areas. Thousands of people have been killed or disabled by, and many more remain exposed to, landmines and UXO.

II. Quantity and quality of the problem / challenge

2. After becoming a party to the Convention, Thailand, through Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), carried out a Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) from May 2000 until June 2001. Key findings included: an estimate of 2,557 square kilometres of mine-contaminated area, the identification of 530 mine impacted communities containing 933 distinct mine and UXO contaminated sites with the most seriously affected communities along Thailand's border with Cambodia; the projection that contaminated areas affected the livelihood and safety of 503,682 persons; and, that most mined areas were of low impact with only 69 of 530 affected communities considered high impact.

3. Based on surveys taken in 131 of the 530 affected communities, between 1969 and 2007 there were 3,551 casualties including 2,045 individuals wounded and 1,506 killed. Collection of forest products was the most frequently reported activity at the time of incidents. Most of the

affected communities depended on the forest for supplies of food, firewood, building materials, hunting, and a route to visit neighbours and family members. The presence of landmines and UXO also resulted in blocked or restricted access to the use of four major resources: forests, croplands, pastures and water.

4. In the past several years the number of landmine victims has significantly decreased as a result of continuous and effective mine risk education (MRE) programmes conducted by Humanitarian Demining Unit (HMAUs), related organizations, and NGOs.

III. National demining structure

5. Shortly after ratifying the Convention, the National Mine Action Committee (NMAC), comprising all major government ministries and departments concerned, was established to develop policies and to monitor the obligations set forth by the Convention. The Thailand Mine Action Center (TMAC) was subsequently established by the NMAC in January 1999 to function as the central coordinating agency for all landmine issues and operations in Thailand. The mission of TMAC is to coordinate, monitor and implement mine clearance, landmine / UXO survey, mine awareness and victim assistance throughout Thailand. TMAC is also responsible for establishing a programme to meet Thailand's obligations as a party to the Convention. TMAC operates under the authority of the Supreme Command Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence, and received Royal Patronage bestowed by the late Her Royal Highness Princess Galayani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra.

6. Four Humanitarian Mine Action Units were established to conduct demining operations and cooperate with other local organizations in conducting MRE and victim assistance. Due to budget limitations, each HMAU has approximately 100 personnel carrying out these tasks. However, with the increase in budget, HMAUs' trained personnel could be expanded up to 2,500-3,000.

IV. Progress achieved

7. At the beginning of the demining process, TMAC used traditional manual clearance methods to clear suspected mine areas. However, as the data derived from the LIS and subsequently entered into TMAC's database misjudged the size and location of the mine problem, further visits and technical surveys were required. TMAC has therefore applied the *Locating Mine Fields Procedure* (LMP) to identify actual mine fields, enable TMAC to set up a national demining plan and accelerate the mine clearance process.

8. Between 2000 and 2008, a total of 1,611.2 square kilometres of suspected mined area has been released as a result of either traditional clearance or the LMP. Of this amount, 1,555.3 square kilometres have been released through the LMP. Therefore, 949.66 square kilometres remain to be released during the extension period. Most of this progress has been made along Thailand's border with Cambodia, which received top priority as it is the most dangerous area. In 2007, there were 12 mine casualties – the lowest annual number since entry into force and a dramatic reduction from 53 casualties recorded in 1999.

V. Locating Mine Fields Procedure pilot project

9. In 2007, TMAC launched the Locating Mine Fields Procedure pilot project in Sa Kaew Province. The main purposes were to record, mark and gather mine information to plan an effective demining operation, as well as to reduce and recheck the suspected mine/UXO contaminated areas identified by the LIS to make sure that they are more precise and unambiguous. An April to October 2007 survey conducted by Humanitarian Mine Action Unit I (HMAU I) under the direction of TMAC, released 32.02 square kilometres and identified 9.19 square kilometres of actual mined area from an original total 41.21 square kilometres of suspected mined area.

10. It was concluded on the basis of this pilot project and subsequent application of the LMP, TMAC estimates that the further application of the LMP will result in approximately 528.2 square kilometres (of the estimated 949.66 square kilometres of remaining suspect mined area) that will need to be released using manual demining, ongoing use of the LMP and other appropriate methods.

VI. Circumstances that have impeded Thailand from complying with its Article 5 obligations within 10 years of entry into force

11. Limitations of the LIS and problems caused by it: The LIS, which was conducted using rough methods and in a restricted time frame, emphasized interviewing people in mine affected areas rather than accessing suspected areas and without the assistance of any technical means. This led to misjudgements. Boundary definitions and area size estimates were imprecise, few minefield perimeters were actually observed and the exact location of the contamination usually was not known by key informants. Most areas with a surface estimate above one square kilometre represented an area where the actual location and/or extent of contamination was unknown. Some safe areas, such as rocky area, agriculture land, et cetera, beyond the data collectors' sight, were included. A total suspected contamination measured as large as 2,557 square kilometres overstated the real risk area and was vague. It is regarded as the preliminary dataset, which identified only suspected mined areas that need to be revisited. As a result of the LIS' imprecision, TMAC had to spend unnecessary costs for clearance.

12. Geographical settings: Ongoing internal conflict in some neighbouring countries and unsettled border demarcation between Thailand and some of its neighbours has caused delays in demining operations.

13. The nature of the mined areas: Conflict resulted in minefields that were not marked, there were few useful records retained and data from minefield records obtained were inaccurate and incomplete. The number of mines was unknown. In addition, mines may have moved due to weather conditions and erosion. In Thailand, most of the mine suspected areas were and are located in the tropical jungle and on dangerous slopes and terrain. This has caused varied difficulties for deminers to access to suspected mined areas.

14. Environmental challenges: Minefields are uneven and cluttered with obstacles due to the nature of the terrain (mountains, rocky terrain, river banks used as confrontation lines during the war operations). Furthermore, heavy vegetation / forest has been a major circumstance impeding more rapid progress. Humidity and heat and leeches in forests during the rainy season, as well as virulent tropical diseases, have posed health threats complicating deminers' work.

15. Limited resources and financial support: As TMAC lies under the Ministry of Defence, it is dependent on the Ministry of Defence's budget, which must be allocated according to different priorities in a given year, for its financial resources and personnel. Unfortunately, TMAC's annual budget decreased from over 38 million Baht in 2004 to 18 million Baht in 2006. This decreased budget was caused by the fact that in the past several years Thailand has been burdened by highly urgent situations such as the flooding disaster in the north, the tsunami disaster and unrest in the three southern provinces. These emergencies created competing demands for resources. However, in recent years the TMAC budget has doubled.

16. Method of clearance: Mine clearance is a dangerous and delicate process which has been both time consuming and resource intensive. By using the traditional manual method from 2002-2006, Thailand's mine clearance has been rather slow, when measured against a wide area, and has resulted in low clearance rate. In 2006, Thailand began to apply the LMP, which was more specific in identifying mined areas. As a result, the clearance rate in the last year dramatically accelerated.

17. International support: Over the past seven years, demining has been funded mainly by support received from the Government of Thailand's annual budget. International funding and assistance has been received from major supporters like Japan and the United States of America and it is increasing, although at present it remains relatively limited. As the task is a costly and time consuming process, it is necessary to receive the concerted attention of all stakeholders, not only the budget allocation by the government.

VII. Remaining challenge

18. As noted, 949.66 square kilometres remain to be released during the extension period. As of September 2008, through the LMP, TMAC has identified 428.39 square kilometres of mined area. TMAC is further carrying out the LMP on 521.27 square kilometres of suspected mined area. It is estimated that, by March 2009, a total of 528.2 square kilometres will need to be released during the extension period using manual demining, ongoing use of the LMP and other appropriate methods.

VIII. Amount of time requested for the extension and rationale

19. In its consideration of the amount of time needed, Thailand pays equal attention to its intention to finish its work within the timeframe granted and the present realistic and practical factors. Past experience proved that demining is a difficult and delicate task that requires time. Clearance productivity in Thailand is about 50 square kilometres per year. Based on the LMP, TMAC will implement a new national annual demining plan with the highly affected

communities earmarked as priorities. The mine clearance method for those remaining contaminated areas will be undertaken by the manual clearance method.

20. Based on the above mentioned estimates of remaining area and existing clearance productivity, as well as factors such as the geographical landscape, ongoing conflict in neighbouring countries and the need to settle disputed borders, Thailand requests 9.5 years (i.e., until 1 November 2018) to fulfil its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention.

IX. Method arrive at the destination

21. TMAC has proposed a practical and realistic mine clearance plan for fulfilling Thailand's obligations by 1 November 2018 with some of the main features as follows:

- (i) In general, minefields will be cleared using the traditional manual method assisted by heavy machinery, mine detection dogs and other tools. The appropriate standing operating procedures for heavy clearance machine is in the process of development.
- (ii) Thailand has prioritised the remaining mine fields according to: (first priority) those that affect safety, (second priority) those that pose barriers to the socio-economic development of Thailand, (third priority) those that affect the ecology/natural preserve in other ways and (fourth priority) those that remain attached to unsettled demarcation lines.
- (iii) As noted, Thailand projects that 528.2 square kilometres will need to be released using manual demining, ongoing use of the LMP and other appropriate methods. Thailand has developed annual timelines for the release of this total area. These annual milestones will provide a benchmark for Thailand to report to the States Parties on progress made in implementing Article 5 during the extension period.
- (iv) On the basis of an analysis of the potential of current capacities, Thailand has projected annual increases in the amount of mine suspected area to be released by demining, from 43.08 square kilometres to be released in 2009 rising up to 169 square kilometres to be released in 2011.
- (v) Given that the majority of mine suspected area can be found in forested areas, Thailand will apply the new standing operating procedures it has developed for the general survey of such areas. In applying these procedures, along with cancellation practices, Thailand expects to release a significant amount of this area through a diligent determination that it is indeed not "mined area" as defined by the Convention. Research and development activities will also focus on more rapidly releasing forested areas.
- (vi) During the extension period, Thailand will continue to comply with its obligations under Article 5, paragraph 2, by maintaining marking of all mine suspected areas, replacing existing markings or placing additional markings as required, and, covering the entire population in mine suspected areas with mine risk education.

- (vii) It is estimated that fulfilment of Article 5 obligations in Thailand will cost a total of 17,435.55 million Baht. Annual projections for funding needs are based on sound formulas regarding extensive experience Thailand has with the real costs for releasing mined areas through the full range of methods (e.g., demining, mine detection dogs, heavy machines). It is expected that Thailand's Budget Bureau will continue to finance the majority of humanitarian demining activities with it projected that State funds will increase over time. State funds will be complemented by funds provided by or obtained from other sources, particularly in the context of States Parties' obligations under Article 6.4 of the Convention.
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