

**Statement by the Chair of the Committee on Article 5 Implementation on the Analysis of the
Request for extension submitted by Serbia**

Mr. President (Chair),

The Committee noted with satisfaction that Serbia had submitted its request in a timely manner and had engaged in a cooperative dialogue with the Committee.

- On 18 March 2022, Serbia submitted to the Chair of the Committee a request for extension of its 1 March 2023 deadline until 1 March 2025.
- The Committee would like to thank the ICBL, GICHD and the Mine Action Review for providing expert input which was instrumental for the engagement of the Committee with Serbia.
- On 15 June 2022, the Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional clarification and information on key areas of the request.
- Serbia provided a response to the Committee's questions on 3 August 2022 and subsequently submitted a revised request on 25 August 2022.

- Serbia's revised extension request is for a period of 21 months, until 31 December 2024.

The request includes information on the progress made by Serbia and highlights the remaining challenges which includes three mined areas measuring 561,800 square metres. The request also indicates that in addition to these areas, Serbia identified, in October 2019 and August 2021, previously unknown areas in Bujanovac municipality which are pending survey. The request indicates that these areas were identified following forest fires in which explosions were heard.

The request indicates that the remaining contamination is located in mountainous areas with challenging terrain and thick vegetation and that the Serbian armed forces use mechanical equipment, (excavators, trucks) to improve the quality of access roads.

The Committee noted that Serbia provided information on progress and remaining challenge in accordance with IMAS and encourages Serbia to continue reporting in this manner.

Serbia's request also highlights the circumstances which impeded Serbia from achieving its deadline including (a) unregistered mine contaminated areas, (b) newly discovered mine suspected areas in Bujanovac, (c) climatic conditions, preventing access to minefields for certain periods of the year, and (d) reduced national financial contributions for the mine action programme due to COVID-19. The Committee noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on national contributions and the commitment of Serbia to ensure additional national funding to implementation of its Article 5 obligations.

As mentioned, Serbia's request is for 21 months (until 31 December 2024). The request indicates that Serbia is projecting that it will need 15 months to recruit survey teams, complete non-technical survey and gather the necessary information to develop a meaningful forward-looking request by 30 March 2024, including a work plan to project with greater certainty the amount of area, the size of each area, matched with a detailed budget and the amount of time necessary for Serbia to complete its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention.

Concerning Serbia's work plan. Serbia indicated that the Serbian Mine Action Centre had developed a non-technical survey project comprising the areas that have been identified for survey and clearance and includes milestones in this regard.

The request indicates that clearance operations can only be conducted from March to December (approximately) and that resources often need to be redirected for the clearance of explosive ordnance (EO) which are impeding infrastructure projects. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request further information on how these factors will be mitigated to ensure completion by the requested deadline. Serbia responded by indicating that operations cannot be carried out throughout the year, but only when weather conditions permit, (over 5 degrees), during the period March – early December. Serbia further responded that it is putting all efforts to effectively use this favourable time of year and that completion depends mainly on the availability of national and donor funds.

The request indicates that a new decree on land release, developed by the Mine Action Centre of the Republic of Serbia (SMAC) in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, will support Serbia's efforts to implement its remaining challenge as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional information on how the new decree will support Serbia's efforts to implement its remaining challenge as efficiently and effectively as possible. Serbia responded by indicating that the new decree will introduce the land release concept that was not defined in the former decree, streamline and improve monitoring and evaluation of demining operations, and introduce the requirement for the development of national standards.

The Committee noted Serbia's commitment to employing the full range of methods in accordance with IMAS to permit the safe return of land to the population and encourages Serbia to continue seeking improved land release and certification techniques which could lead to Serbia fulfilling its obligations in a shorter time frame.

The request indicates that mine risk education (MRE) activities will be conducted parallel to survey activities in Bujanovac. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request further information on the inclusion of a detailed costed and multi-year plan for context specific mine risk education and reduction in affected communities, including who will carry out mine risk education and reduction (e.g. survey teams) and whether additional financial resources are necessary.

Serbia responded by indicating that MRE activities will be conducted in Bujanovac schools in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, in order to target the most vulnerable population – children. Serbia further indicated that MRE will be carried out by SMAC and non-technical survey teams in all 59 villages of the Bujanovac municipality with financial resources covered by the non-technical survey project developed by SMAC.

The Committee noted the importance of Serbia providing regular updates on its MRE and other risk education programmes in article 7 reports, including methodologies used, the challenges faced, and the results achieved, with information disaggregated by gender and age.

The Committee noted that the information provided in the request and subsequently in responses to the Committee's questions is comprehensive, complete and clear. The Committee further noted that the plan presented by Serbia is workable, lends itself well to be monitored, and states clearly which factors could affect the pace of implementation. The Committee also noted that the plan is based on allocations from State budgets and contingent upon increased international funding. In this regard, the Committee noted that the Convention would benefit from Serbia reporting annually to the States Parties on the following:

- Progress made relative to the commitments contained in Serbia's work plan and the results of survey and clearance efforts in a manner consistent with IMAS;

- The impact of survey and clearance outcomes how new information affects the timeframe for implementation;
- The remaining challenge reported in a manner consistent with IMAS and disaggregated by suspected hazardous areas and confirmed hazardous areas and their respective sizes;
- Adjusted milestones, including information on the number of areas and amount of mined area to be addressed manually and how priorities have been established;
- Progress in developing relevant land release standards, policies and methodologies, in line with IMAS, for the full and expedient implementation of the Convention during the extension request period;
- Updates regarding the implementation of mine risk education and reduction efforts in affected communities, including information on the methodologies used, the challenges faced and the results achieved, with information disaggregated by gender and age;
- Resource mobilization efforts, external financing received and resource made available by the Government of Serbia to support implementation efforts; and
- Information on how implementation efforts take into consideration the different needs and perspectives of women, girls, boy and men and the needs and experiences of people in affected communities.

In addition, the Committee noted the importance of Serbia reporting as noted above, of keeping the States Parties regularly apprised of other pertinent developments regarding the implementation of Article 5 and other commitments made in the request at Intersessional Meetings, Meetings of the States Parties and Review Conferences as well as through its Article 7 reports.