

# Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

26 September 2022

Original: English

---

## Twentieth Meeting

Geneva, 21-25 November 2022

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

### Consideration of requests submitted under Article 5

## Analysis of the request submitted by Serbia 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 Committee on Article 5 Implementation (Belgium, France, Iraq and Sri Lanka)

1. Serbia acceded to the Convention on 18 September 2003 and the Convention entered into force for Serbia on 1 March 2004. In its initial transparency report submitted on 1 September 2004 Serbia reported areas under its jurisdiction or control containing, or suspected to contain, anti-personnel mines. Serbia was obliged to destroy or ensure the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control by 1 March 2014. Serbia, believing that it would be unable to do so by that date, submitted a request to the 2013 Thirteenth Meeting of the States Parties (13MSP) for a five-year extension of its deadline, until 1 March 2019. The 13MSP agreed unanimously to grant the request.

2. On 14 March 2018, Serbia submitted to the Chair of the Committee on Article 5 Implementation (“the Committee”) a request for an extension of its 1 March 2019 deadline. On 4 June 2018, the Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional clarification and information on the extension. On 28 June 2018, Serbia submitted to the Committee additional clarification in response to the Committee’s questions. Serbia’s request was for 4 years, until 1 March 2023. The Seventeenth Meeting of the States Parties (17MSP) agreed unanimously to grant the request.

3. In granting the request, the 17MSP highlighted in its decision that while Serbia had not been able to complete the implementation of the principal commitment it had made, as recorded in the decisions of the 13MSP, to complete implementation by its deadline in 2019, it has made commendable progress and has committed to address the remaining challenge over the extension period. The 17MSP further noted that Serbia may find itself in a situation wherein it could proceed with implementation faster than that suggested by the amount of time requested.

4. 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. 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 Committee noted that Serbia had submitted the request in accordance with the process established by the States Parties and has



engaged in cooperative dialogue with the Committee on matters related to the extension request.

5. The request indicates that at the time of Serbia's last extension request the remaining challenge totalled 12 suspected hazardous areas (SHA) measuring 2,354,540 square metres located in the Municipality of Bujanovac. The request indicates that during the extension period Serbia released a total of 1,792,740 square metres through clearance destroying in the process a total of 61 anti-personnel mines and 2,952 items of exploded ordnance. The request further indicates that Serbia has also addressed a number of areas contaminated by cluster munitions and unexploded ordnance. The Committee noted that Serbia provided information on progress in a matter disaggregated by area cancelled through non-technical survey, area reduced through technical survey and area cleared and encourages Serbia to continue providing information in this manner.

6. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional information on Serbia's current policies to undertake land release in accordance with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). Serbia responded by indicating that mined areas were addressed through manual clearance and the preference for this methodology is due to a) unregistered mined areas, and b) climatic conditions that are not appropriate for other clearance assets. Serbia further responded that land can be released a) non-technical survey, b) technical survey, c) clearance d) mechanical demining and e) canine demining.

7. 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, including detailed information on the national system/plans to ensure that information is managed efficiently, particularly when it comes to surveying new areas. 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 the importance of Serbia ensures that its national mine action standards are up to date in accordance with the latest IMAS, adapts them to new challenges and employs best practices to ensure efficient and effective implementation. The Committee noted Serbia's commitment to employing the full range of methods 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.

8. The request indicates that the following factors, in Serbia's view, acted as impeding circumstances during Serbia's second extension period: (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.

9. The request indicates that, while there have been no new casualties during the course of the last extension period, anti-personnel mines continue to have humanitarian and socio-economic impact on communities in the municipality of Bujanovac, the most underdeveloped municipality in Serbia. The request indicates that mine contaminated areas affect the safety of people, hinders safe exploitation of woods and the development of agricultural livelihoods. The request further indicates that due to contamination road communications are blocked, the environment affected, and fire risks increased. The request further indicates that there have been no new mine victims in the period since the submission of the previous request. The Committee noted that completion of Article 5 implementation during the requested extension period had the potential of making a significant contribution to improving human safety and socio-economic conditions in affected areas in Serbia.

10. The request indicates a remaining challenge of 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. The request indicates that these areas were identified following forest fires in which explosions were heard. The request indicates that these areas are pending survey. 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.

11. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional information on the estimated size of the areas to be surveyed and an estimation of the area that may be subject to technical survey, and clearance on the basis of previous experience. Serbia responded by indicating that SMAC had developed a non-technical survey project comprising the areas that have been identified for survey and clearance, consisting of:

- Area of 1,777,367 square metres - in the area of the village Djordjevac;
- Area of 156,125 square metres - between the villages of Veliki Trnovac and Končulj;
- Area of 1,317,575 square metres - located in the area of the village of Končulj, between the villages Končulj and Dobrosin;
- Area of 830,383 square metres - located between the villages of Lučane and Dobrosin;
- Area of 286,193 square metres in the village of Nesalce - located west of the Nesalce village, on the local road to the village of Vrban.

12. The Committee noted the information provided by Serbia on these areas and the importance of Serbia making use of the full range of practical methods to rapidly release, with a high level of confidence, areas suspected of containing anti-personnel mines. As the Committee previously noted, doing so may lead to Serbia fulfilling its obligations in a shorter time frame.

13. As noted, 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.

14. The request indicates that the period of the extension request is a realistic period in which Serbia will put maximum effort into clearing known areas totalling 561,800 square metres in 2022. The request indicates that national and international funds for 2022 clearance operations have been secured. The request includes a framework of project implementation for 12 months including estimates of areas to be surveyed and area that may be subject to land release totalling 4,367,643 square metres, with 2,367,643 square metres projected to be cancelled through non-technical survey, 1,500,000 square metres to be reduced through technical survey, and 500,000 square metres cleared.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. The Committee noted that the request includes other relevant information that may be of use to the States Parties in assessing and considering the request, including further detail on national demining structures, photos of handover and post-clearance activities, photos and description of the characteristics of Serbia's remaining minefields, risks and assumptions of the work plan, together with annexed maps relating to remaining areas to be addressed.

18. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request further information on how Serbia ensures that the different needs and perspectives of women, girls, boys and men in affected communities are considered and inform all areas of Convention implementation and mine action programmes. Serbia responded by indicating that it insists on gender equality, and that during survey and community liaison activities women, men and children are consulted. Serbia further responded by indicating that it ensures equal access to employment for qualified women and men in survey, clearance and MRE activities. The Committee noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report on this matter.

19. The request indicates that implementation of the work plan for the period 2022-2024 will be accomplished through contributions from the Government of Serbia totalling 1,040,000 euros (260'000 euros per year) to be supported by international donations of 1,600,000 euros, that are to be matched through International Trust Fund - enhancing human security (ITF). The Committee wrote to Serbia to request further information on its efforts to mobilize additional national and international resources (e.g. utilisation of Serbian armed forces, and potential new donors), the status of international funding and if funding is currently available to initiate the planned survey of newly discovered areas. Serbia responded by indicating that projects for the clearance and technical survey of 561,800 square metres have been developed for known areas and carried out in 2022 with funds provided by Serbia and matched through the ITF with international support of the United States of America (US) and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Serbia further indicated that a project for non-technical survey has been developed for the period 2022-2023 and is currently in negotiation with the ITF and the United States (US) for additional international funding. Serbia further indicated that funding for 2022-2025, including the survey and clearance of newly identified SHAs, is estimated to total 3,040,000 euros and that Serbia is currently in negotiation with ITF and other available funding sources. Serbia indicated that with a total national financial contribution of 1,040,000 euros, a total of 2,000,000 euros is still pending. Serbia further indicated that bilateral meetings have been held with donor states including Japan, ROK and the US and that it will continue approaching potential donors and raise awareness of the funding problem with State authorities, public enterprises and local authorities. The Committee acknowledged the commitment of the Government of Serbia to its demining program through the budget assigned to carry out demining activities and noted Serbia's efforts to increase its national contribution to support the implementation of its Article 5 obligations. The Committee further noted the importance of Serbia developing a resource mobilisation plan and using all mechanisms of the Convention to disseminate information on challenges and requirements for assistance, including through Article 7 reports.

20. 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:

- i. 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 in accordance with the land release methodology employed, (i.e.

- cancelled through non-technical survey, reduced through technical survey, and cleared through clearance);
- ii. The impact of survey and clearance outcomes and updates on how additional clarity obtained may change Serbia's assessment of the remaining implementation challenge and timeframe for implementation;
  - iii. The remaining challenge reported in a manner consistent with IMAS and disaggregated by suspected hazardous areas and confirmed hazardous areas and their respective sizes;
  - iv. Adjusted milestones, including information on the number of areas and amount of mined area to be addressed manually and how priorities have been established;
  - v. 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;
  - vi. 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;
  - vii. Resource mobilization efforts, external financing received and resource made available by the Government of Serbia to support implementation efforts; and
  - viii. 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.

21. 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 using the Guide for Reporting.

---