

## Türkiye Mine Action Programme: Project for Completion

Wednesday, 22 November 2023

### Introduction and participants

On 22 November 2023, Türkiye and the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, with the support of the Implementation Support Unit, invited State and civil society representatives to engage in an open and frank discussion regarding Türkiye's needs and challenges in implementing its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention. In particular, Türkiye's efforts to complete its Article 5 obligations along its border.

Participants received an invitation package, including an agenda and background information on Türkiye's mine action programme. Participants will receive a copy of Türkiye's presentation as an annex to this report. These documents will also be made available on Türkiye's country page of the Convention website<sup>1</sup>.

### Participants

**States:** Algeria, Canada, Finland, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Netherlands, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, and the United States.

**Organizations:** European Union, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Parliamentary Union (IPU), Mine Action Review, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit.

### Opening

Following a welcome and introduction of the Individualised Approach by Thailand, as Chair of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance and moderator of the event, Director of the Türkiye Mine Action Centre (TURMAC), provided opening remarks followed by a presentation by **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** shared a presentation on the status and progress of Türkiye's implementation of its Article 5 obligations. The floor was then opened to **Mr. Allan Poston, Chief Technical Advisor of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** in Türkiye, to provide further input relating to Türkiye's efficiency and effectiveness in addressing mined areas. Participants then engaged in an informal discussion about possible cooperation and assistance in support of Türkiye's implementation efforts.

### Presentation

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** mentioned that Türkiye assumed its obligations as a State Party to the Convention, 1 March 2004, and that since this time, Türkiye has been fully committed to fulfilling its Article 5 obligations by 1 March 2014. However, while significant progress has been made in fulfilling Türkiye's commitments under Article 5 since entry into force, on 28 March 2013 Türkiye submitted a request for extension of its mine clearance deadline in accordance with Article 5. The request was granted by the Thirteenth Meeting of the States Parties (13MSP) and a new deadline was set for 1 March 2022. On 17 March 2015, Türkiye acted upon the decisions of the 13MSP by submitting an updated work plan for the implementation of Article 5 of the Convention. On 26 March 2021, Türkiye submitted a second request to extend its mine clearance deadline. The request was granted

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apminebanconvention.org/en/membership/turkiye/>

by the Nineteenth Meeting of the States Parties (19MSP) in November 2021, and a new deadline was set for 31 December 2025. On 2 May 2023, Türkiye acted upon the decisions of the 19MSP by submitting an updated work plan for the implementation of Article 5 of the Convention.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** added that as part of its achievements, in 2011, Türkiye declared completion of the destruction of nearly 3 million stockpiled mines, fulfilling its stockpile destruction commitment under Article 4 of the Convention.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that anti-personnel mines in Türkiye were mainly laid along its borders and other areas during the period of 1955 to 1998 with the purpose of reinforcing security of its borders. In response, the Ministry of Defence of Türkiye has been addressing these areas and designed the Eastern Borders Clearance Project with the UNDP. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** provided an outline of Phase I,II, and III conducted between 2016-2023 along the border of Türkiye with Armenia and Iran. Phase IV is planned to take place along Türkiye's border with Iran. Mine contamination is located within military zones which cover a much broader area than the mined area. Once a mined area is cleared, it enables the use of land for development, including agriculture and livestock activities. During Phase I (2016-2017), 13 mined areas were cleared, in the process destroying 23,724 anti-personnel mines. During Phase II, (2018-2019), a total of 25 mined areas were cleared, resulting in the destruction of 23,277 anti-personnel mines. For Phase III, (2021-2023), a total of 94 mined areas were released, destroying 49,336 anti-personnel mines.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** provided figures related to the outcome of the Eastern Borders Clearance in Türkiye in addition to its outputs in terms of Mine Action.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** noted that in February 2023, Turkey experienced a devastating and very distressing earthquake, and that according to the Presidency Earthquake Assessment report, it was noted that the total material and financial cost of the earthquake, described as the "disaster of the century", was "103.6 billion dollars". The report also noted that this figure, "corresponds to approximately 9 percent of Türkiye's national income expectation for 2023" and that "it caused material damage and losses approximately 6 times higher than the 1999 Marmara Earthquake." The earthquake response placed further pressure on demining resources as military teams were deployed to assist in the earthquake response.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** further highlighted the impact of Türkiye hosting an estimated 3.4 million refugees in border areas at this time. The high number of refugee's places people at risk of an accident with anti-personnel mines and the importance of having an integrated border management system in place.

## **Discussion**

**The European Union (EU)** thanked Türkiye for its presentation and noted the close cooperation between the EU and Türkiye and the commitment shared by both parties to the Convention. The EU welcomed the efficient manner in which Türkiye's has carried out its implementation efforts.

**Director of TURMAC** thanked the EU for its 8 years of collaboration with Türkiye's mine action programme and expressed the interest of TURMAC in continuing its partnership with the EU with the aim to address mine contamination and secure the border areas. **Director of TURMAC** further expressed Türkiye's interest in discussing opportunities for further partnership with the EU and its partner countries.

**Mr. Qadeem Tariq, Mine Action Programme Specialist, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and Central Asia,** noted the impressive quality and efficiency of Türkiye's implementation efforts and the lessons

learned and best practices acquired to date. The UNDP also asked for further information on the pattern of mined areas in Türkiye and the potential role of integrating the understanding of mine laying patterns into land release operations, which could potentially further improve cost-effectiveness and efficiency. The UNDP also asked for information on the current status of clearance along the Türkiye-Armenia border.

In response, **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** mentioned that the 85 mined areas identified to be addressed during Phase IV were laid by the Turkish military during the 1990s and that all mined areas have records, a discernable pattern, in line with NATO regulations, and that Türkiye does not expect any variation in efficiency and the effectiveness compared to the previous phases of the project. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** further highlighted that the border areas with Armenia were addressed during Phase II and III of the previous project and clearance of the mined areas along the border with Armenia has been completed.

**The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)** asked for further information on the information management system used by Türkiye and how it supports prioritisation, reporting and monitoring of implementation of the project.

**Mr. Allan Poston, Chief Technical Advisor, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Türkiye** explained that the information management system used by the Türkiye mine action programme was implemented during Phase I of the project. Mr. Poston also explained that the system used includes two key components; i) the use of digital GPS, which allows the daily progress of each deminer to be catalogued, and ii) that all data collected is quality checked by a 'quality management contractor' and then checked by UNDP before being securely transmitted to the TURMAC and that these two factors result in greater confidence that processed land is indeed safe.

**Director of TURMAC** explained that the Turkish military is using the same information management system that collects all necessary information from the field and that this information is double checked at the end of the project with the UNDP. **Director of TURMAC** indicated that all required information is entered into the same information management system.

**The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)** requested further information on four matters, i) clarification concerning Türkiye's intention of submitting an extension request of its 2025 deadline ii) information on mined areas located on Türkiye's border with Iraq, Syria, or Greece iii) information on improvised anti-personnel mines in border areas and, iv) Türkiye's financial and or technical assistance provided to other affected countries.

In response, **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** noted that in its initial extension request, Türkiye declared that its first extension request submitted in 2021 was an initial one to acquire additional clarity on the remaining challenge, and that it intends to submit a request to extend its 31 December 2025 deadline. In terms the remaining challenge on Türkiye's respective border areas, Türkiye does not have any mined areas in border areas with Bulgaria, Georgia, or Greece, and as mentioned previously, all mined areas along the Türkiye-Armenia border have been addressed. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that a third of the mined areas on the Türkiye-Iran border have been addressed by military demining units. Regard the Türkiye-Syria border, after the civil war started in Syria in 2011 Türkiye worked to complete a border security system, including demining a path along the mined areas. However, this effort was solely to clear a passageways in order to facilitate construction of the security system and did not include the total clearance of the mined areas.

In regard to anti-personnel mines of an improvised nature, **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that Türkiye has not identified improvised explosive devices in mined areas. Regarding the provision of financial and technical support, **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that currently Türkiye provides support to Azerbaijan's mine clearance activities with one demining unit, consisting of four demining teams, clearing over 600,000 square metres of land during their operations.

**Director of TURMAC** provided additional comments, namely that Türkiye is supporting mine action in Cambodia. Mr. Mehmet explained that four years ago, Türkiye signed a memorandum of understanding with the Cambodia Mine Action Centre for the provision of equipment, and that this year Türkiye will contribute US \$1 million to Cambodia's mine clearance efforts.

**Japan** thanked Türkiye for its clear presentation and noted that, as a member of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation Assistance, Japan is looking forward to working with Türkiye over the next year. Japan indicated that the information provided by Türkiye will be shared with the Japanese Cooperation Bureau and also the Japanese Embassy in Ankara. Japan noted Türkiye's important geographic location and the importance of donor support, including support for disaster management. Japan encouraged Türkiye to work with the UNDP to include demining as a component in development projects, such as disaster management. Such integration would make it easier to approach Embassies such as Japan, and possibly other Embassies. Japan closed by sharing its hope that Türkiye will be able to fulfill its objectives by its deadline.

**Algeria** shared its full support as member of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance and indicated that it looks forward to working with Türkiye on the Committee next year. Algeria expressed its interest in exploring all possibilities of cooperation. Algeria noted the value and importance of achieving mine free status. Algeria further indicated that Algeria declared itself free of mines in 2016 after more than 50 years of demining and reiterated its interest in furthering cooperation with Türkiye.

**UNMAS** requested further information on two matters: i) Türkiye's plans to address mined areas along the Türkiye-Iraq and Syria border, and ii) current casualties figures and victim assistance activities.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** provided further information on mine contamination along the borders with Syria and Iraq. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that mined areas located along Türkiye's borders, of Syria, Iraq, Armenia, and Iran were all laid within the military 'forbidden zones' established as a security measure to protect borders during the period after the Cold War era until the 1990s. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** further highlighted that these mined areas are fenced and under observation of military and border units. Despite this, unfortunately, migrants often enter mined areas. In relation to casualties, **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** mentioned that Türkiye is reporting lower numbers of casualties each year and that further reductions are expected once clearance is completed, in line with the new border security system. In regard to victim assistance, **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that TURMAC is working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs to ensure that all survivors receive financial support, rehabilitation support from medical centres which are available even in small villages in the eastern and southern provinces of Türkiye.

**Director of TURMAC** provided further information on mine risk education activities, explaining that approximately 505,000 people live in proximity of mined areas, and that all mined areas are secured with fences. **Director of TURMAC** mentioned that due to mine risk education local populations know

how to behave when they come across mines, and that TURMAC has also concluded a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education to share risk education lessons as part of the school curriculum, and that based on all these efforts casualties numbers are decreasing.

**Thailand**, as Chair of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance, mentioned that Türkiye is a good example a country with a well organised mine action programme. And that Türkiye is also a good example of a country that is in a position to provide assistance and also in a position to receive additional support. In this regard, Thailand asked for further information on the level of national ownership demonstrated by Türkiye in mine action and the synergy in implementing obligations of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, and other international Conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** shared further information regarding national ownership. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** explained that the Turkish Government had allocated €1.7 million to Phase IV of the project but noted that Türkiye is requesting an estimated €15 million to be funded by external sources. Further to national ownership since the establishment of TURMAC in 2015, the number of demining units has increased from three to eight, addressing up to 10 to 12 million square metres of contaminated land each year. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** also explained that Türkiye produced mechanical demining machines with the assistance of the Ministry of National Defence that are now used by the national demining units. **Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** added that in addition to this allocation for the Phase IV Project, the Turkish Ministry of National Defence earmarked a budget of €10,71 million, for future mine clearance (10 years) in Türkiye.

**Mr. Allan Poston, Chief Technical Advisor of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Türkiye** explained that during Phase IV it is projected that Van Province will be completed and that this achievement would represent a significant step for Türkiye as it releases a whole province from mine contamination along the easter border. This is a significant step towards Türkiye's implementation of its Article 5 obligations.

Mr. Poston added that non-technical survey (NTS) in Türkiye is almost complete, identifying an estimated 3,400 hazard areas of which, approximately, 800-900 have no records. Mr. Poston encouraged TURMAC to concentrate efforts to include the results of Türkiye's NTS in Türkiye's Article 7 transparency report, (to be submitted 30 April 2024).

Mr. Poston further added that while many of the mined areas identified by the NTS could be reduced by technical survey. However, Phase IV of the project will include full clearance as the mined areas have been confirmed. Nevertheless, technical survey will assist in Türkiye reducing mined areas in other locations.

### **Summary and follow up**

**Director of TURMAC** expressed Türkiye's interest in fulfilling its Article 5 obligations and its interest in engaging partner countries and organization in order to accelerating implementation. He also expressed his hope that through increased collaboration Türkiye can address all remaining mined areas and fulfil Türkiye's promise to the Convention.

**Head of Survey Branch, TURMAC** expressed his appreciation for all the valuable opinions shared and expressed his appreciation.

In closing, **Thailand took the floor** to provide an overview of the way forward, including continued engagement by the Committee with Türkiye over the coming year and the distribution of a summary report to all participants and encouraged participants to continue their engagement with Türkiye regarding the Phase IV project proposal.

For further information on the Mine Action Program in Türkiye please direct all queries to:  
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