

Fifth Review Conference 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

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Consideration of submissions of States Parties as provided for in 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: Colombia (Chair), Sweden, Thailand, and the United Kingdom*

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. Since then, Serbia has submitted requests for extensions of its deadline to the Seventeenth Meeting of the States Parties (17MSP) in 2018 and the Twentieth Meeting of the States Parties (20MSP) in 2022. On each occasion, the Meetings of the States Parties agreed unanimously to grant Serbia its request for extension. The request for extension granted to Serbia by the Twentieth Meeting of the States Parties was for 21 months until 31 December 2024.

3. In granting Serbia's request, the meeting noted that, while Serbia had not been able to complete implementation of the principal commitment it had made, as recorded in the decisions of the 17MSP, to complete implementation by its 1 March 2023 deadline, Serbia has made commendable progress. The Meeting further noted Serbia's continued commitment to the implementation of Article 5. The meeting further noted that Serbia was projecting that it would need approximately twenty-one months to complete non-technical survey and gather the necessary information to develop a meaningful forward-looking request for extension by 31 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.

4. On 27 March 2024, Serbia submitted to the Committee on Article 5 Implementation ("the Committee") a request for extension of its 31 December 2024 deadline. On 29 June 2024, the Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional clarification and information on key areas of the request. Serbia submitted to the Committee a revised request on 2 August 2024. Serbia's request is for two years until 31 December 2026. The Committee noted that

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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 revised request indicates that at the time of Serbia's last extension request, the remaining challenge included three suspected hazardous areas (SHA) measuring 561,800 square metres and previously unknown suspected mined areas discovered in the Municipality of Bujanovac. The revised request indicates that during the extension period, Serbia released a total of 293,700 square metres through technical survey and clearance, destroying in the process five items of unexploded ordnance. In light of the information provided by Serbia, noting particularly that no anti-personnel mines were discovered during technical survey and clearance, the Committee wrote to Serbia requesting additional information on lessons learned in implementation during the previous extension period and information on Serbia's efforts to update its national standards in accordance with the latest International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) to ensure efficient and effective implementation. Serbia indicated in its request that by the end of 2023, the Serbian Mine Action Centre (SMAC) had developed three standards including on land release, a glossary of terminology and on quality management.

6. The revised request indicates that manual clearance is Serbia's preferred methodology to address its remaining challenges due to the following factors: a) unregistered mine-contaminated areas with anti-personnel mines deployed in no specific patterns b) climactic conditions - most of the remaining suspected mined areas in Serbia are mountainous with challenging terrain and thick vegetation, c) due to suspicion of the presence of anti-personnel mines areas have not been accessed since the end of the conflict (2000-2001), meaning that the land has been unmanaged and is difficult to access.

7. The Committee noted the importance of Serbia continuing to develop relevant land release standards, policies, and methodologies in line with IMAS for the full and expedient implementation of the Convention during the extension period. The Committee also noted that should Serbia continue to seek improved land release techniques, Serbia may find itself able to complete implementation in a shorter timeframe than requested. The Committee further noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report on progress in implementation in a manner consistent with IMAS to ensure a clear understanding of the progress made by Serbia in the implementation of its obligations under Article 5 (i.e., cancelled through non-technical survey, reduced through technical survey, or cleared through clearance and disaggregated by the type of explosive ordnance identified and destroyed (e.g., anti-personnel mines, anti-tank mines)).

8. The request indicates that survey of SHAs within the *ground safety zone* along the administrative lines with Kosovo and Metohija were delayed due to security concerns. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional information on the status of security along the administrative line and the efforts made by Serbia to mitigate the impact of security concerns on the implementation of activities to be carried out during the requested extension period. Serbia indicated in its revised request that Serbia plans to complete the implementation of the presented work plan ahead of its requested deadline in the situation where security concerns do not continue to impact access and deployment of survey teams. The Committee noted that, while Serbia had not been able to complete the implementation of the principal commitments made in its previous request as recorded in the decisions of the 20MSP to complete implementation of non-technical survey in Bujanovac municipality by its 31 December 2024 deadline, Serbia had made progress and noted Serbia's continued commitment to the implementation of Article 5. The Committee also stressed the importance of Serbia keeping the States Parties apprised of changes in the security situation and the potential positive or negative impact on survey and clearance activities.

9. The revised request indicates that the following factors, in Serbia's view, acted as impeding circumstances during the extension period: a) unregistered mine contaminated areas, b) newly discovered SHA's, c) climatic conditions, d) contamination other than mines, and e) delayed implementation of the non-technical survey project.

10. The revised request indicates a remaining challenge of one SHA measuring 268,100 square metres in the Municipality of Bujanovac (village of Ravno Bučje) and five SHAs measuring 4,367,643 square metres, in the Municipality of Bujanovac as follows:

- a) 1,777,367 square metres - in the village Djordjevac, site numbers; 0240/20, and 0193-4/17;
- b) 156,125 square metres - between the villages of Veliki Trnovac and Končulj, site numbers; 0134/12 and 0240/21;
- c) 1,317,575 square metres - located in the village of Končulj, between the villages Končulj and Dobrosin, site number; 0209/18;
- d) 830,383 square metres - located between the villages of Lučane and Dobrosin, site numbers; 0199/18, 0245/21, and 0179/15);
- e) 286,193 square metres in the village of Nesalce - located west of the Nesalce village, on the local road to the village of Vrbani.

11. The revised request indicates that Serbia is also contaminated by cluster munitions and unexploded ordnance, and that in the Sava River there are improvised mines remaining from the 1991-1995 conflicts. The request further indicates that after fire and explosions in military depots in Paraćin, Vranje, Kraljevo, Požarevac, Valjevo, Novi Sad, Smederevo, Raška, Grdelica, Kragujevac, there are various types of explosive remnants of war in an area of approximately 18,000,000 square metres. The Committee noted that Serbia's efforts to implement Article 5 are only part of the totality of efforts required to address explosive hazards and, as such, noted the importance of Serbia continuing to provide information disaggregated by type of contamination.

12. The Committee further noted the importance of Serbia continuing to provide information on the remaining challenges in a manner consistent with IMAS, by disaggregating by 'suspect hazardous areas' and 'confirmed hazardous areas' and their relative size, including by disaggregating by the type of contamination, to ensure increased clarity on the remaining challenges.

13. The revised request indicates that in 2022-2023, there were no demining accidents in the Republic of Serbia and that anti-personnel mines continue to have a humanitarian and socio-economic impact in Serbia, including a) the safety of people, b) the safe exploitation of forest products, development of cattle breeding, mushroom picking, and tobacco production, c) blockage of road communications resulting in increased fire risks, and d) prevention of the construction of solar plants, tobacco processing facilities, as well as the development of the region through an increased flow of people, goods, services and new employment opportunities. The Committee noted that the completion of Article 5 implementation during the requested extension period had the potential to make a significant contribution to improving human safety and socio-economic conditions in Serbia.

14. As noted, Serbia's request is for two years (until 31 December 2026). The revised request indicates that during this period, Serbia is projecting to clear 1 remaining SHA measuring 268,100 square metres and will require 18 months to complete non-technical survey of Bujanovac municipality to gather the necessary information to develop a subsequent request for extension, including a work plan for completion of Article 5, to be submitted by 31 March 2026.

15. The revised request includes a work plan for the period of the extension including:

- a) Addressing 268,100 square metres (2024);
- b) Finalise procedures and procure equipment for non-technical survey (April 2024);
- c) Recruitment, training, and deployment of survey teams (April – September 2024);
- d) Survey of SHAs (September 2024 - January 2025);
- e) Survey of additional areas discovered during NTS (February – March 2025);
- f) Analysis of survey results – August 2024 (June 2025);
- g) Development of technical survey and clearance work plan (October 2025).

16. The Committee noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report on its efforts to analyse survey results and report on how additional clarity obtained may change Serbia's assessment of the remaining implementation challenge and timeframe for implementation.

17. The revised request further indicates the main risks and assumptions that may negatively affect progress during the extension request period including: a) the level of international national funding made available for the implementation of the work plan, and b) additional mine areas are discovered ahead of completion.

18. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional information on the potential impact of weather on operations. Serbia indicated in its response that during the period of December - March, a temperature of over 5 degrees Celsius is required for demining to be carried out. The Committee noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report on its efforts to consider climate and environmental considerations in the implementation of the Convention.

19. The revised request includes a work plan for mine risk education activities to be conducted in 59 villages and primary and high schools of Bujanovac municipality during the extension period, applying appropriate methods while working with men and women in culturally sensitive environments, as well as with different age groups. The request includes a budget of €48,008 for mine risk education activities covered by the non-technical survey project developed by SMAC. The Committee noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report 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.

20. The Committee wrote to Serbia to request additional information on Serbia's efforts to ensure that the diverse needs and perspectives of women, girls, boys, and men are considered and inform Serbia's non-technical survey and mine risk education activities, including its efforts to establish their baseline through inclusive consultations with women, girls, boys, and men. Serbia indicated in its revised request that in 2014, following the initiative of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister of Construction, Transportation, and Infrastructure, a Coordination Body for Gender Equality was established as a national coordinating mechanism for gender equality in the Republic of Serbia. This body recognizes the importance of improving the position of women, especially focusing on increasing the number of women entrepreneurs, as well as their equal participation in management bodies in education, science, culture, information, sports, agriculture, and rural development. The Committee noted the importance of Serbia reporting on how implementation efforts consider the different needs and perspectives of women, girls, boys, and men as well as the diverse needs and experiences of people in affected communities.

21. The revised request includes a detailed budget for the activities to be implemented during the extension period, including €760,000 in secured funding for the clearance of 268,100 square metres in 2024, a national financial contribution of €260,000 and €500,000 in international donations matched through International Trust Fund - Enhancing Human Security (ITF), and €1,520,000 in secured funding for non-technical survey activities to be carried out in the period 2024-2025, including a national financial contribution of €520,000, (€260,000 per year) and €1,000,000 (€500,000 per year) in international donations matched through ITF. The revised request further indicates the expectation that the Serbian Government will continue to allocate the funds for demining operations throughout the requested extension period. In this regard, the Committee noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report on its resource mobilisation efforts, external financing received, and resources made available by the Government of Serbia to support implementation efforts.

22. In this regard, the Committee also noted the importance of Serbia continuing to report on its efforts to strengthen the inclusive nature of Serbia's mine action programme through the establishment, where relevant, of a national mine action platform, including the terms of reference, scope, membership and meeting frequency.

23. 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 details on national demining structures, new explosive ordnance disposal training grounds, photos,

and a description of the characteristics of Serbia's mined areas, together with maps of the location of remaining mined areas.

24. 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 the State budget 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:

(a) Progress made relative to the commitments contained in Serbia's work plan with progress in survey and clearance presented in a manner consistent with IMAS and progress in accordance with the land release methodology employed (i.e., cancelled through non-technical survey, reduced through technical survey, or cleared through clearance);

(b) The impact of survey and clearance outcomes and how additional clarity obtained may change Serbia's assessment of the remaining implementation challenge and timeframe for implementation, including adjusted annual milestones with information on the number of areas and amount of mined area to be addressed annually and how priorities have been established;

(c) The remaining challenge in a manner consistent with IMAS, by disaggregating by 'suspect hazardous areas', and 'confirmed hazardous areas' and their relative size including by disaggregating between the type of contamination to ensure increased clarity on the remaining challenges;

(d) 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;

(e) Efforts to ensure consideration for the different needs and perspectives of women, girls, boys and men and the diverse needs and experiences of people in affected communities as well as climate and environmental considerations in the implementation of the Convention;

(f) Changes in the security situation and the potential positive or negative impact on survey and clearance activities;

(g) Efforts to make provisions for a sustainable national capacity to address previously unknown mined areas, including newly mined areas discovered following the completion of Serbia's Article 5 obligations;

(h) Progress in implementation of mine risk education and reduction activities in affected communities, including information on the methodologies used, the challenges faced, and the results achieved, with information disaggregated by gender and age, and;

(i) The humanitarian, social, economic, and environmental implications of contamination including information on victims disaggregated by gender and age;

(j) Resource mobilisation efforts, external financing received, and resource made available by the Government of Serbia to support implementation efforts.

25. 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.