



**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
MINE ACTION CENTRE**

ANTI - PERSONNEL MINE BAN CONVENTION

20th MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES

UPDATE ON ARTICLE 5 IMPLEMENTATION

21-25 November 2022

Distinguished President, distinguished delegates,

The delegation of the Republic of Serbia would like to use this opportunity to express our pleasure at participating in the work of the 20th Meeting of the States Parties and congratulate and commend Colombia on their able Presidency.

Furthermore, we would like to use this opportunity to thank the ISU, Director Juan Carlos Ruan, Gregory and the whole team for their kind and devoted assistance throughout the extension request preparation process. Their constructive comments have assisted in best presenting Serbia's status, challenges and needs in implementing Article 5 obligations.

Serbia is strongly committed to the full implementation of its obligations from the AP Mine Ban Convention, which is shown by the fact that AP mines are no longer produced in Serbia and the stockpiled AP mines have been destroyed.

However, due to the fact that Serbia has been facing a number of difficulties, such as the lack of adequate financial resources, and presence of areas contaminated with cluster munitions, air bombs-rockets and other UXO in addition to mine contaminated areas, whose clearance also requires substantial funds, unfortunately, Serbia is in no position to meet its Article 5 obligation deadline by March 2023.

Consequently, in March 2022, Serbia applied for a **third extension of the deadline for fulfilling its obligations to the Convention and in August 2022 submitted a revised request until 1 December 2024.**

There are a number of circumstances that have impeded Serbia from complying with its 4-year period of the second extension request. Particular issues faced by Serbia are as follows:

-Unregistered mine contaminated areas: The remaining areas contaminated by mines do not have registries and have not been planted in specific patterns, which aggravates demining efforts, namely survey results are subject to alterations.

-Newly discovered mine suspected areas in Bujanovac, in October 2019 and in August 2021.

-Climactic conditions: Contaminated areas are inaccessible during some periods of the year causing operation delays.

-Contamination other than mines: Specificity and complexity of the problem presents the fact that apart from mines still remaining in the territory of Serbia, Serbia also encounters with numerous challenges related to clearance of the areas contaminated with unexploded cluster munitions, air bombs – rockets and other UXO, as well as residual contamination and clearance operations triggered by infrastructure development projects.

-COVID-19 crisis: -In 2020, the Serbian Government initially allocated 350.000 EUR for demining operations, but due to the COVID-19 crisis and government measures in the fight against consequences of the crisis, the demining budget was decreased to 260.000 EUR.

As of November 2022, in the Republic of Serbia the area suspected to contain groups of anti-personnel mines totals **390,300 square metres in the Municipality of Bujanovac, plus newly discovered mine suspected areas in the Bujanovac Municipality.**

In the period September - October 2022, two projects by the SMAC were implemented in the Municipality of Bujanovac, total area of 171.500 sqm. The funds for the projects were provided by the Serbian Government from the 2022 national funds which were matched, through ITF Enhancing Human Security, by the Republic of Korea and U.S. donations.

The project area totalling 390,300 square metres will be divided into three projects for which we hope to provide financial support through ITF by available donors and implement these projects in the forthcoming period.

Serbia is requesting extension of the deadline under Article 5 until 1 December 2024. This would provide the possibility to complete non-technical survey of **newly discovered mine suspected areas in the Bujanovac Municipality**, which will take up to 1 year and will focus on the areas where fire forests occurred and explosions could be heard. By then, Serbia will get a clear picture of the remaining mine contamination and development of a detailed plan containing SHA and CHA will be enabled.

SMAC is in negotiations with ITF and U.S. Embassy to find the donor funds to start a non-technical survey project, that will include 2 mixed survey teams plus operational manager (1 Serbian and 1 Albanian team of 2 surveyors each), which will be fully trained and equipped to conduct required tasks. These activities will be supervised and monitored by SMAC and in cooperation with the local authorities.

Simultaneously with survey activities, MRE activities will be conducted in all 59 villages of the Municipality of Bujanovac.

Mine suspected area has been marked in order to clearly and visually warn of mine danger, as well as to ban the entry of population into mine suspected area. Mine warning signs have been posted in the areas of possible access to mined areas (roads, paths and other areas where movement of people is expected).

Given that the population is multi-ethnic, the wording on the signs has been written in Serbian and Albanian.

Serbia is making efforts to solve the problems related to mines and other explosive remnants of war and the Government, within its modest possibilities, allocates funds for demining operations, but given the extent of the problem of mines and other explosive remnants of war, this is not enough to solve the overall mine problem.

Serbia needs international funds and time to complete the task at hand.

On another note, we would like to take this opportunity to highlight the following achievements:

In order for the SMAC to create an effective system for information management in mine action, in August 2022, the Donation Agreement has been signed between the GICHD and SMAC, whereas the SMAC will be implementing IMSMA Core over a project period of 1 year.

SMAC representatives attended the Regional Course on Quality Management in Mine Action held for representatives of the Balkan countries, in September 2022, in Rome, organized by the GICHD in cooperation with the Italian C-IED Centre of Excellence.

In addition, in the period 7-11 November, 2022, in Spiez, Switzerland, SMAC representative attended the 86th Partnership for Peace Training Course on International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) and Conformance organized by the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and the Government of Switzerland.

SMAC is also participating in Norwegian People's Aid Project *Enhancing Quality Management Systems of National Mine Action Authorities and Centers in Western Balkans*. This project, financed by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, will improve the management capabilities and support national ownership and leadership in mine action.

In conclusion, as a member of the States Parties, despite all the unfavorable circumstances, the Republic of Serbia is fully committed to comply with all the provisions of the Convention by ensuring the total clearance of all known mined areas in Serbia and achieving by 2025 the noble goal of a mine-free world.

Significant results have been achieved in the field of humanitarian demining in Serbia thanks to donor assistance and engagement of state authorities in Serbia.

We would also like to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to all those who have helped us in the previous period: US, Republic of Korea, Japan, Germany, Norway, Canada, Czech Republic, Spain, Switzerland, EU, France and ITF Enhancing Human Security.

We expect to continue our joint engagement until the complete demining of Serbia. Serbia is in its final phase and donors have the opportunity to be part of the completion process.

We have requested from our Government to continue to allocate funds in the years of the requested extension.

We would like to take the opportunity to point out that demining does not only contribute to greater security of people and the environment, but also that it has social, economic and other aspects.

Therefore, we especially appeal to donors to help us solve this, for Serbia and its citizens, a huge problem.

Thank you for your attention.