

Mine Clearance In Bosnia And Herzegovina

Press Statement

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Sarajevo, 1 May 1996

We are all aware of the mine pollution problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina, arising from 5 years of war. Although work has begun to remove these hazards, less than half of the minefields are marked and those cleared by military engineers are not accepted as safe for the purpose of civilian access.

A strategy for dealing with this problem was raised as priority issue at the Joint Interim Commission on 27 February. The High Representative and the Prime Ministers of the Governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, endorsed the view that this major task would be carried forward in the long term by a national Mine Clearing Agency, with the continuing assistance of the international community.

It was also agreed that in view of the current political situation and the urgency of the problem, there was a need to establish a structure now, which would tackle the immediate requirements and enable the reconstruction process to proceed smoothly. This structure would consist of a Mine Clearance Policy Group, chaired by the Office of the High Representative under the auspices of the Joint Civilian Commission and a Mine Action Centre, which would be based in Sarajevo. This would act as the operational arm and coordinate all civil mine clearance countrywide. The Mine Action Centre would evolve into the national body referred to earlier, at a point to be agreed later.

The first meeting of the Policy Group took place yesterday, with full participation by representatives of the Governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska. Those major international agencies with a role to play in mine clearance, were also represented. These included the EU, USG, ICRC, IFOR, UN DHA, UN DPKO, UNHCR, and the World Bank. The principal functions of the Policy Group would be:

- Mine clearance strategy
- Arbitration
- Priorities of work
- Policy direction to the MAC
- Monitor progress and quality standards
- Donor funding and financial strategy
- Assist with the creation of a national mine clearance agency

All participants expressed strong support for the concept and agreed the following points:

- The work of the Policy Group would be conducted in an even handed and apolitical manner.
- The ultimate responsibility for clearing and destroying mines lies with the Parties. The final goal of international assistance is to create an indigenous mine clearance capability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. All mines cleared would be destroyed.
- Due to the political situation and a shortage of resources, the assistance of the international community would be necessary for a period of time. This assistance would include:
 - The formation of a UN led Mine Action Centre, to serve as a central clearing house for mine hazard information, to coordinate mine clearance and mine awareness activities, to certify all demining organisations operating within Bosnia and Herzegovina and to train

indigenous staff to conduct these activities.

- The necessary funding and equipment staff to establish and run the MAC. This would be provided by the US government and the EU.
- Priorities for quick start project would be:
 - Mine awareness programmes
 - Dwellings
 - Public utilities and infrastructure
 - Industrial capability

Specific demining projects would be identified as soon as possible and submitted for approval at the next meeting.

- Local staff would be employed by the MAC in consultation with the parties and on an equitable basis.
- The MAC would move from its temporary site to a location provided by the Federal Government, as soon as possible.

The chairman would like to express his appreciation for the professional and constructive manner in which the meeting was conducted.