
Mine incidents per capita in Karabakh exceed Afghanistan three times

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KarabakhOpen - 12/4/2008

Since 1995 there were 225 incidents of mine and unexploded ammunition blasts. The total number of casualties is 298, including 78 children. 66 people died. Most incidents occurred in 2004 and totaled 27, 10 were killed. This year one incident occurred killing a 15-year-old boy. The number of mine incidents per capital exceeds Afghanistan three times.

Since 2000 The HALO Trust, one of the major mine clearance organizations in the world, has been working in Karabakh. The organization also works in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Angola, Somali, Kosovo, Georgia and other countries.

According to the organization, in Karabakh mines were planted during the military conflict, in addition, cluster bombs, projectiles and other ammunition were used extensively.

Since 2000, 214 fields have been cleared of mines, and 301 have been cleared of unexploded ammunition. 130 sq km of land has been returned to the population. 8244 mines and 42 thousand pieces of ammunition have been disposed.

In an interview with Karabakh-Open.com the manager of The HALO Trust for Karabakh Patrick Thompson said as of the beginning of 2008 186 minefields and 350 fields contaminated with ammunition remain. With the current rate of funding and mine clearance personnel it will take 5 to 6 years and 15 million dollars to finish mine clearance.

According to the manager of the program, the organization first arrived in Karabakh in 1995 to study the engineering services for humanitarian mine clearance. Afterwards, at the invitation of the Karabakh government in 2000 the organization set up an office in Stepanakert.

This year the organization recruited a staff and finished their training. Last week the team started mine clearance. Last year the mine clearance personnel included 195 people, this year a personnel of 265 works. It includes men aged 25 to 55, the average monthly salary is 350 U.S. dollars.

It is a perilous job but work is organized in a way so as to reduce risk. Patrick Thompson says over the past 8 years there were three incidents during mine clearance, no deaths.

The HALO Trust is a humanitarian, not a political organization, says Patrick Thompson, the manager for Karabakh. He says they cooperate with the authorities of this territory and are satisfied with this cooperation. They coordinate their work with the Center for Mine Problem of the NKR government, to which they report. They also report to their donors. According to Patrick Thompson, currently they are sponsored by the governments of Holland, the UK, the USA, as well as Julia Burke which joined this year.

The manager of The HALO Trust says it is not easy to find sponsors. He thinks the reason of reluctance of donors regarding Karabakh is that Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is not recognized.

In answer to our question whether The HALO Trust has partners in Azerbaijan,

Patrick Thompson said no, they only know that in Azerbaijan the national agency of mine clearance deals with mine clearance.

In Karabakh The HALO Trust cooperated with the Rescue Service. He says they cooperate with local and international organizations which ask them to study and if needed clear the territory of mines before launching construction or other activities.
