

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should make a formal commitment to respect and implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).
- Nagorno-Karabakh should comply with its obligations under international human rights law to clear cluster munition remnants (CMR) on territory under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible.
- Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should set up a mine action centre to coordinate survey and clearance, introduce mine action standards and work on mobilising resources.
- Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should provide funding for the work.

UNDERSTANDING OF CMR CONTAMINATION

Nagorno-Karabakh already had extensive contamination by cluster munitions before the six-week conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan that broke out in September 2020 (see Table 1). The HALO Trust had raised its estimate of the affected area to 71.3km² compared with 70.5km² at the end of 2019 with increases in Askeran and Martuni.¹

Extensive use of cluster munitions in the 2020 conflict has added considerable CMR contamination in territory controlled by Nagorno-Karabakh, the precise extent of which had still to be determined. International human rights organisations reported Azerbaijani forces fired rockets armed with cluster munitions hitting targets in the capital Stepanakert.² Rapid assessment by HALO Trust found that contamination affected nearly three-quarters of all Nagorno-Karabakh settlements, including 20% of Stepanakert, 21% of Martuni, and 34% of Martakert.³

Fierce fighting for six weeks was brought to an end on 8 November 2020 by a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement. Azerbaijan gained control of a substantial part of Nagorno-Karabakh (approximately one-third of the territory previously controlled by Armenia) where a new Line of Contact (LOC) is patrolled by Russian peacekeeping forces, with the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh local authorities retaining control over part of the centre and north of the region. Area now under Azerbaijan’s control includes what had been Nagorno-Karabakh’s second town of Shushi.

Loss of territory has increased population pressures on available land, raising the humanitarian threat posed by explosive remnants of war (ERW), including submunitions, on land that may previously have been considered low-threat areas. The most prevalent submunitions are Israeli-produced M095/M085 dual-purpose submunitions and Soviet-era 9N235s, but HALO Trust also identified Russian-made ShOAB and PTAB submunitions.⁴

Table 1: Cluster munition-contaminated area (at September 2020, prior to the outbreak of the conflict)⁵

District	CHAs	Area (m ²)
Askeran	58	20,507,558
Hadrut	29	10,667,696
Lachin	17	8,500,000
Martakert	45	11,701,498
Martuni	58	15,461,585
Shushi	8	4,000,000
Stepanakert	1	500,000
Totals	216	71,338,337

CHA = Confirmed hazardous area

OTHER EXPLOSIVE REMNANTS OF WAR AND LANDMINES

Nagorno-Karabakh is also contaminated by other ERW and anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines (see Mine Action Review’s *Clearing the Mines* report on Nagorno-Karabakh for further information).

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a national mine action centre. Nagorno-Karabakh's security chief, Major-General Vitaly Balasanyan, set up a working group in early 2021 to coordinate clearance of explosive remnants of war (ERW). The working group meets weekly with participation from the Rescue Service and humanitarian mine clearance organisations.⁶

The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMAC) in 2000 but the project did not attract local support and stalled.⁷ Discussions on the issue with Nagorno-Karabakh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2019 and 2020 as well as with the State Emergency Services and the Ministry of Agriculture but did not lead to any decision.⁸ A mine action coordination committee responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust ended in 2018.⁹

The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities do not provide HALO Trust with funding to clear affected areas.¹⁰

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

HALO's Nagorno-Karabakh programme follows the organisation's gender and diversity policies, providing equal access to employment for women and engaging them in management and operational roles.¹¹ HALO's staff of 137 in 2020 included 19 women, with four holding supervisory positions and eleven working in field operations.¹² As 13% of HALO's staff they represented a smaller proportion than in previous years because of an increase in staff numbers. HALO's most senior national staff member is a woman and women have been employed in both survey and clearance. HALO appointed the first woman for non-technical survey in 2019 and by 2021 all HALO survey teams included at least one woman.¹³

All groups affected by CMR and anti-personnel mines, including women and children, are said to be consulted during survey and community liaison activities. Relevant mine action data are disaggregated by sex and age.¹⁴

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a mine action information management system; The HALO Trust operates its own database.¹⁵ In 2020, HALO switched to an online server (cloud system) that it refers to as the Global Operations Information Management System (GO-IMS).

No central mechanism exists for systematic sharing of data on mine clearance, underscoring the value of a mine action authority. The emergency services share information on explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) call-outs and advance notice of demolitions.¹⁶ The Nagorno-Karabakh Army Liaison Officer shares information with The HALO Trust on a regular basis on items found, incidents, confirmed hazardous areas, and clearance. HALO is not authorised to share this data with others.¹⁷

PLANNING AND TASKING

Prior to the outbreak of the conflict in September 2020, HALO Trust focused activities on survey and clearance of mined areas in line with donor wishes, giving priority to areas where confirmed accidents indicated the greatest humanitarian threat and where cleared areas were most likely to be put to use. Starting in 2019 HALO had embarked on a countrywide survey of mine contamination. After the 2020 conflict, HALO Trust put the mine survey on hold and has given priority to a baseline survey of CMR and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) resulting from the war as well as conducting battle area clearance (BAC) and EOD. It aimed to complete the survey, covering all villages, by the end of September 2021.¹⁸

HALO Trust selects tasks according to its own prioritisation matrix but works closely with local authorities. HALO, together with the Rescue Service and the Humanitarian Demining Centre (HAK) attend weekly meetings of the working group set up in early 2021 to coordinate clearance.¹⁹

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Nagorno-Karabakh has no local mine action standards. The HALO Trust follows its internal standard operating procedures but it updated its BAC standing operating procedures (SOPs) in 2020 to address the threat from urban contamination.²⁰

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

Since it started working in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2000, HALO Trust has been and remains the main organisation conducting land release. Clearance is conducted mostly in the summer months between May and October. The HALO Trust's overall staff numbers fell from 159 at the start of the year to 137 by September after financing support from USAID ended in April 2020. In the process, HALO reduced the number of manual clearance teams from twelve to seven, and the number of deminers from 74 to 54. In February 2021, HALO recruited new staff increasing the total staff to 155 and in the process increasing the number of survey teams from five to seven and the number of clearance teams from eight to ten. It also converted two non-technical survey teams to conduct only EOD and operated two mechanical teams with eight staff. HALO reported an urgent need for more staff but further expansion was not expected without additional donor support.²¹

The Nagorno-Karabakh Emergency Service, formerly known as the Rescue Service, conducts EOD spot tasks and has reportedly conducted some BAC. HALO works very closely with the Rescue Service and has provided many of its staff with EOD and clearance training.²² One Nagorno-Karabakh army unit conducts limited demining.²³ Russian peacekeepers have conducted area clearance and spot EOD since the conflict. The units have not shared details of clearance operations but coordinated with HALO Trust on carrying out demolitions.²⁴

A new local mine clearance organisation, HAK, was established in 2020, initially with one clearance team. In 2020, it was mainly focused on getting established and learning about contamination and conducted was not reportedly very active operationally. HALO Trust said it provided HAK with information and equipment, including detectors and personal protective equipment (PPE).²⁵

DEMINER SAFETY

The HALO Trust did not experience any demining or EOD accidents resulting in casualties in 2020. However, all men under 58 were conscripted into the army during the 2020 war and three serving and four former HALO Trust staff were killed in the fighting.²⁶

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2020

HALO Trust operations in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 focused on survey and clearance of landmines and ERW and only started to address cluster munitions contamination in November after the war. HALO destroyed 73 submunitions in EOD operations in 2020.²⁷

Productivity dropped sharply in the past five years because of donor hesitancy. Despite the sharply increased humanitarian threat posed by cluster munitions and other ERW since the 2020 war, prospects for scaling up clearance are limited by funding constraints.²⁸

Table 2: Five-year summary of CMR clearance

Year	Area cleared (km ²)
2020	0
2019	0.05
2018	0
2017	1.06
2016	3.28
Total	4.39

- 1 Email from Miles Hawthorn, Programme Manager, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
- 2 Human Rights Watch, "Azerbaijan: Cluster munitions used in Nagorno-Karabakh", 23 October 2020; Amnesty International, "Armenia/Azerbaijan: civilians must be protected from use of banned cluster munitions", 5 October 2020.
- 3 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
- 4 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021; and International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Visual Explainer", Last updated 7 May 2021, at: <https://bit.ly/3ui0ou2>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 20 May 2021.
- 7 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, Field Officer, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 8 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May and 4 September 2020 and from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
- 9 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 10 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.

- 13 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 29 July 2021.
- 14 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 15 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 16 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 17 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 18 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
- 19 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 20 May 2021.
- 20 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
- 21 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April and 20 May 2021.
- 22 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 20 May 2021.
- 28 Email from Miles Hawthorn, HALO Trust, 18 April 2021.