

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should make a formal commitment to respect and implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).
- The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities and both Armenia and Azerbaijan should refrain from any further use of cluster munitions.
- 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.
- Survey and clearance of CMR should resume and the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities should provide funding for the work.

UNDERSTANDING OF AP MINE CONTAMINATION

Nagorno-Karabakh has extensive contamination by CMR but the extent has not been determined precisely. HALO Trust reported 213 confirmed hazardous areas (CHAs) covering 70.48km² at the end of 2019 (see Table 1). The total area was marginally less overall than a year earlier, largely as a result of correcting an error in 2018 data for Askeran, but HALO also recorded a slight increase in the number and size of CMR-affected areas in Hadrut.¹

Cluster bombs were dropped extensively across Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijani Air Force during the 1988 conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Following the cease fire in 1994 tensions flared up again in April 2016 when fighting broke out briefly along the Line of Contact (LOC). While ground fighting was confined to areas close to the LOC, artillery fire penetrated more than 10km into Nagorno-Karabakh, and included use of cluster munitions. The HALO Trust calculated the four days of hostilities added 2.4km² of CMR contamination, all of which has now been cleared.² In late September 2020, hostilities broke out again, involving Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan, with reports that cluster munitions were again being fired into Stepanakert. Amnesty International ascribed the new use to Azerbaijan.³

Table 1: Cluster munition-contaminated area by region (at end 2019)⁴

District	CHAs	Area (m ²)
Askeran	56	20,017,656
Hadrut	29	10,667,696
Lachin	17	8,500,000
Martakert	45	11,701,498
Martuni	57	15,094,233
Shushi	8	4,000,000
Stepanakert	1	500,000
Totals	213	70,481,083

NATIONAL OWNERSHIP AND PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a national mine action centre. The HALO Trust established the Nagorno-Karabakh Mine Action Centre (NKMAC) in 2000, which it hoped would consolidate all mine action-related information and respond to requests from the government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities. The project did not, however, attract local support and has been moribund for several years.⁵

Proposals for establishing a national centre were supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in meetings with The HALO Trust at the end of 2019 and discussions continued in 2020. HALO reported constructive talks on the issue with the State Emergency Services and the Ministry of Agriculture.⁶

A mine action coordination committee is responsible for liaising between the local authorities and The HALO Trust. Regular coordination committee meetings were held between the local authorities, HALO Trust, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) until 2018 when the head of the committee was moved to a new post. The position remains vacant, with HALO Trust continuing to lobby for a suitable candidate to fill the role.⁷

The Nagorno-Karabakh authorities do not provide The HALO Trust with any funding to clear mined areas.⁸

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.⁹ Its most senior national staff member is female and women have been employed in both survey and clearance. HALO appointed the first woman for non-technical survey in 2019 but from 2020, all HALO survey teams were planned to include at least one woman. Women made up around 13% of HALO's staff in 2019, about the same as in the previous year, and expected to hire more women, subject to the availability of funding.¹⁰

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 is disaggregated by sex and age.¹¹ But gender is said to be not taken into account in the prioritisation, planning, and tasking of survey and clearance activities.¹²

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

Nagorno-Karabakh does not have a mine action information management system; The HALO Trust operates its own database.¹³

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.¹⁴ The Nagorno-Karabakh Army Liaison Officer shares information with The HALO Trust on items found, incidents, CHAs, and clearance on a regular basis. HALO is not authorised to share this data with others.¹⁵

PLANNING AND TASKING

There is no national mine action strategy currently in place in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹⁶

HALO Trust's work plan has focused on completing existing tasks, giving priority to areas where confirmed accidents indicate the greatest humanitarian threat and where cleared areas are most likely to be put to use. HALO Trust started a nationwide survey in 2019, focusing on Martakert as Nagorno-Karabakh's most heavily mine-contaminated region. When new information of contamination is received, such as a mine find or incident, HALO tasks a non-technical survey team to respond within 48 hours. Otherwise, the survey was due to continue in 2020 on a region-by-region basis.¹⁷

LAND RELEASE SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND LAND RELEASE EFFICIENCY

Nagorno-Karabakh has no local mine action standards. The Nagorno-Karabakh police were planning to lobby the government to develop standards while The HALO Trust planned to support calls for national standards as part of discussions on creating a mine action authority.¹⁸

In the meantime, The HALO Trust follows its internal standing operating procedures.¹⁹

OPERATORS AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS

The HALO Trust has been the main organisation conducting land release in Nagorno-Karabakh since it started working there in 2000. The Nagorno-Karabakh Emergency Service, formerly known as the Rescue Service, conducts EOD spot tasks and has reportedly conducted some battle area clearance (BAC). One Nagorno-Karabakh army unit conducts limited demining.²⁰

Clearance is conducted mostly in the summer months between May and October. In 2019, HALO Trust operated with a total staff that peaked at 242 at the end of September before winding down in line with normal practice to 159 at the end of the year. At the end of 2019, HALO had 12 manual clearance teams with a total of 79 deminers who conduct both mine clearance and BAC together with four non-technical survey teams each with four personnel and two mechanical teams with a total of eight personnel. Uncertainty over the level of continued United States (US) funding raised the possibility that HALO Trust would reduce staff further in 2020 rather than build up capacity over the summer.²¹

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS COMPLETION

LAND RELEASE OUTPUTS IN 2019

HALO Trust did not conduct any non-technical or technical survey of CMR-affected areas in 2019 but cleared 51,160m² in Askeran, destroying a single submunition.²²

No target date has currently been set for the clearance of all CMR contamination in Nagorno-Karabakh.²³ HALO Trust currently prioritises clearance of mines over CMR in compliance with restrictions imposed by donors. Fundraising for CMR clearance has proved challenging due to Nagorno-Karabakh's international isolation and the territorial restrictions that donors often place on funding.²⁴

CMR has dropped dramatically since 2014 as a result of lack of funding (see Table 2).

The outbreak of hostilities in late September 2020 raised concerns that significant new CMR contamination could be added, in addition to the direct and significant risk to civilians arising from the new use of cluster munitions.

Table 2: Five-year summary of CMR clearance

Year	Area cleared (km ²)
2019	0.05
2018	0
2017	1.06
2016	3.28
2015	2.91
Total	7.30

- 1 Emails from Rob Syfret, Programme Manager, HALO Trust, 7 May, and 4 and 7 September 2020.
- 2 Emails from Amasia Zargarian, Programme Support Officer, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 3 Amnesty International, "Armenia/Azerbaijan: Civilians must be protected from use of banned cluster bombs", 5 October 2020, at: bit.ly/30DvCl3.
- 4 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May, and 4 and 7 September 2020.
- 5 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 28 June 2013; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, Field Officer, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 6 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May and 4 September 2020.
- 7 Emails from Andrew Moore, HALO Trust, 26 May 2016; and Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 8 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 11 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 14 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 13 May 2020.
- 15 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 18 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 26 April 2019.
- 19 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 20 Emails from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020; and Amasia Zargarian, HALO Trust, 4 May 2018.
- 21 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 22 Email from Rob Syfret, HALO Trust, 7 May 2020.
- 23 Email from Asqanaz Hambardzumyan, HALO Trust, 10 April 2019.
- 24 The HALO Trust, "Our role in Nagorno-Karabakh", accessed 10 April 2019.