
**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling,
Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel
Mines and on Their Destruction**

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Consideration of requests submitted under article 5

**Request for extension of the deadline for completing the
destruction of anti-personnel mines in accordance with
article 5 of the Convention**

Executive summary

Submitted by Colombia

1. The main source of anti-personnel mine contamination in Colombia is the mines laid by illegal armed groups in order to protect areas where they grow illegal crops, to hamper the advance of security forces or to protect areas that they consider to be of strategic interest. Security forces have not resorted to the use of anti-personnel mines since Colombia signed the Convention.

2. In 2010, Colombia concluded the work of clearing minefields around its 35 listed military bases. This work was carried out under the supervision of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Defense Board. The fact that the clearance of these mined areas was completed by the deadline initially set out under article 5 demonstrates Colombia's commitment to meeting its obligations as a State party to the Convention.

3. Colombia's present request for an extension is based on the extent and nature of anti-personnel mine contamination associated with the violent actions of illegal armed groups. The origins of the problem lie in the calculated military strategy of those groups, which have admitted to employing such arms with two basic aims: to hamper the action taken by security forces against these criminal groups and to protect their main sources of revenue, such as coca crops and corridors for the trafficking of coca and other illegal goods.

4. The use of anti-personnel mines by illegal armed groups has had a serious impact on the well-being of Colombians. A total of 13,234 incidents related to the use of anti-personnel mines by illegal armed groups were registered in Colombia between January 2002 and December 2009. Between 1990 and 2009, 8,245 Colombians suffered accidents caused by these devices. Most of these incidents have occurred in nine natural regions of Colombia: Montes de María; Catatumbo; Serranía de San Lucas; the Urabá, Paramillo, Bajo Cauca Antioqueño corridor; the Arauca, Boyacá, Casanare corridor; Eastern

Antioquía; the foothills and forests of Meta, Caquetá and Guaviare; Cañón de las Hermosas; and south-western Colombia (Cauca-Nariño-Putumayo).

5. The confirmed or suspected presence of minefields is one of the single greatest obstacles confronting displaced families who are seeking to recover the full exercise of their rights in their place of origin. The Government of President Juan Manuel Santos and Vice-President Angelino Garzón hopes to pass a land act aimed at returning land unlawfully expropriated by illegal armed groups to its rightful owners. To make the policy on returns feasible, it will be necessary to ensure that such areas have been cleared of anti-personnel mines.

6. It is equally important to note that the presence of anti-personnel mines has had differing impacts on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Anti-personnel mines have, for example, exacerbated the cultural uprooting of indigenous communities.

7. Article 5 of the Convention draws attention to the States parties' obligation "to destroy or ensure the destruction of *all* anti-personnel mines in mined areas *under its jurisdiction or control*" (emphasis added). Colombia is requesting a 10-year extension for its efforts to ensure that its commitments under the Convention are honoured because the full extent of contamination cannot be determined, since illegal armed groups continue to lay anti-personnel mines. Given the uncertainty regarding where and for how long those groups will continue to employ anti-personnel mines, a number of variables (such as the possibility that more explosive devices will be laid and changes in security conditions) need to be factored into operational planning. For that reason, Colombia has no baseline from which to establish a clear link between the point of departure, the progress made and the extent of the work that still needs to be done to clear areas contaminated by devices placed by illegal armed groups. Although methods for the management of information on the subject have been outlined in the Presidential Programme of Comprehensive Action against Anti-Personnel Mines (PAICMA) and there is a robust database for the registration of victims and incidents at the municipal level, shortcomings continue to exist in respect of the completeness and quality of the information supplied by various sources. This is due, not to a lack of diligence or appropriateness in the design and use of information-gathering tools and methodologies, but to the specific nature of the situation, which greatly hinders the detection of anti-personnel mines and the identification of mined areas.

8. Given this uncertainty and the lack of complete information, the Colombian Government has resorted to using statistical tools to estimate a baseline for the potential extent of contamination in every municipality. Based on that estimate (for which the supporting assumptions are set out in the methodological annex to the extension request), the clearance, using technical and non-technical means, of a total area of 50.5 km² of what is thought to be contaminated land, spread over 601 municipalities, has been deemed necessary. It should be pointed out that this request for an extension constitutes the first occasion on which Colombia has signalled that the areas contaminated with anti-personnel mines could be larger than previously thought. This baseline estimate was made with a view to determining, in the light of existing trends and an analysis of developments in mined areas and the progress made in humanitarian mine clearance, how much land area may be contaminated and, on that basis, whether capacity might be increased. Colombia has, at every opportunity, sought to explain the difficulties involved in estimating the amount of land containing anti-personnel mines, especially in a situation of armed violence.

9. In spite of the complexity of the situation, humanitarian mine-clearing squads have proceeded with operations in communities where mines have been laid by illegal armed groups. A total of 54 minefields in 10 municipalities have been identified and cleared. Altogether, as a result of the demining operations conducted in communities affected by the actions of illegal armed groups, a total of 311,186 m² have been cleared and 262 home-made anti-personnel mines and 321 explosive remnants of war have been destroyed,

thereby directly benefiting more than 1,739 inhabitants in those municipalities. The crux of the difficulty in pinpointing mined areas and determining the extent of contamination lies in the fact that illegal armed groups place these devices randomly and indiscriminately, without regard for any military doctrine, which means that suspicious areas can be identified only when an incident involving anti-personnel mines takes place.

10. In accordance with Colombian regulations, humanitarian mine-clearing work, carried out by Engineers Battalion No. 60 (and, perhaps in the future, specialized civilian organizations), is directed by the National Intersectoral Commission for Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines, acting as the national authority on the matter, and by PAICMA, which functions as a mine-action coordination centre with the support of the Ministry of Defence and the Comprehensive Action Coordination Centre.

11. The first mine-clearing squad was established in 2004, and three more squads were added in late 2006. In 2009, Engineers Battalion No. 60, which conducts humanitarian mine-clearance operations, was set up as part of the recently established Special Engineers Brigade, but under the operational command of the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces. Thus far, all humanitarian mine clearance in Colombia, including that of the military bases, has been performed by these units. The battalion now has eight manual mine-clearing squads, one mechanical unit and a further squad in training. Its work meets the International Mine Action Standards, and the complete destruction of anti-personnel mines in the areas in which it works is therefore ensured.

12. Decisions on which areas to clear are taken in accordance with the priorities established by PAICMA, which acts as technical secretary for the National Intersectoral Commission for Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines, in conjunction with the General Command of the Armed Forces. In addition, the OAS Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines programme provides financial and technical support for mine clearance, including systems of quality control. In February 2009, the Colombian Government also decided to draft and implement regulations to allow all qualifying civilian organizations to perform mine-clearance operations.

13. To that end, the Colombian authorities are working on framework regulations for humanitarian mine clearance that will allow the State to supervise and monitor these activities. At the moment, Congress is debating a bill that would amend Law and Order Act No. 418 of 1997 in order to permit civilian organizations to clear mines. The Government is also making progress, with the support of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), in establishing preliminary technical guidelines, including standard operating procedures in the areas of prioritization, task allocation, information management and quality control of humanitarian mine-clearing operations. Under the Government's territorial consolidation policy, civilians will be allowed to carry out mine-clearance work only in those parts of the country in which security has been fully restored.

14. Given the specific nature of the security situation in Colombia, the complete register of areas over which control has been re-established and those where illegal armed groups are present is a matter of national security, and this information is administered by the Ministry of Defence. For that reason, mine-clearing operations are assigned in consultation with the authorities responsible for overseeing the nation's policies on defence and national security and on the return of displaced persons. These assignments are also based on legislative and other developments with regard to the restitution of land to the victims of violence. In any event, Colombia has at all times stood ready and willing to keep States parties informed, within the framework of its obligations under the Convention, of progress made in identifying mine-affected areas and conducting mine-action operations.

15. To be clear, the reason behind the request for an extension is that the destruction of minefields laid by illegal armed groups is limited by the pace of the progress made in

restoring security under the Security Consolidation Policy, as mine clearance will be carried out only in areas where there has been a complete return to normality. All humanitarian operations to clear areas mined by illegal armed groups have been carried out in areas where the State has implemented its strategy of social consolidation, thus ensuring the complete safety of humanitarian mine-clearing teams, the faith of the communities concerned in the safety of their lands, the subsequent restoration of the civilian population's right to freedom of movement and the reinstatement of social, economic and cultural activities in the beneficiary communities. This is not a minor consideration, in that it ensures the sustainability of operations and provides an incentive for the recovery of conditions conducive to development in the relevant communities.

16. With regard to the question of incomplete reporting, the request for an extension is also based on the fact that the country's municipalities are clearly defined in territorial and constitutional terms as the unit to be used for progress reports. Thus, when all the information management activities related to the identification of minefields at the municipality level and the subsequent technical mine-clearance work have been carried out, complete reports on the 601 municipalities concerned will be submitted under article 7. In 2010, for operational reasons, the Colombian Government drafted an action plan to clean up the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database. That plan involves matching up information gaps in the IMSMA database with non-technical field study assignments. In addition, information obtained from the socio-economic impact survey of the 250 communities in Eastern Antioquía and Montes de María (two of the nine regions most affected by mines) indicates that 40 communities had been affected to some extent by such weapons. At present, the results of the Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) are being examined as part of the PAICMA programme and have been used as inputs for the preparation of non-technical studies by civilian mine-clearance operators under the memorandums of agreement reached between the Government and the HALO Trust and Mines Advisory Group (MAG). Colombia has considered the possibility of replicating the Landmine Impact Survey methodology in order to expand coverage and to compile information on areas affected by anti-personnel mines.

17. In addition, PAICMA, supported by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and UNMAS, has made considerable progress in 2010 in the improvement of processes and procedures relating to mine-action information management. Processes and procedures for evaluating each of the items reported upon and updating its entry in the IMSMA database have been designed. It should be pointed out that, although the database contains an historical register of incidents involving anti-personnel mines since 1990, the Colombian Government has stated on several occasions that the information on some items is not sufficient to allow operations to go ahead. For that reason, the Government considers advances in information management to be crucial.

18. On the basis of these two components of the rationale for its request, Colombia is adopting a three-pronged work strategy.

19. The first involves formalizing the tools and stages involved in the planning and allocation of tasks, in line with the State's capacities, the extent of the affected areas and the situation in each one. This includes such activities as: the design of interfaces for the analysis of information on the degree to which areas are affected by mines and on the scheduling of clearance operations; the updating of methods for estimating available resources; the establishment of decision-making procedures for planning and for the selection of areas to be cleared; and consultations with communities, organizations and other sectors of the population. The required budget for this element of the work strategy has been estimated at US\$ 110,000. Most of these tasks are now being carried out or were completed in 2010. However, since regulations governing the involvement of civilian organizations are not yet in place, information management procedures and methods may

still require adjustments in line with the needs of operators or those agents responsible for their implementation. Hence the need to continue activities aimed at improving information management in 2011, as provided for in this extension request.

20. The second prong of the work strategy deals with optimizing processes and methods for gathering operational information. Activities include: updating the tools used to compile information on the state of mine-affected areas; analysing the results of the 2009 Landmine Impact Survey and carrying out a second survey of this type at the subnational level; designing and implementing information auditing and monitoring mechanisms; determining the location of items in the IMSMA database for which geographical coordinates are not given and inter-municipal mapping; and optimizing the information register on progress in mine-clearance operations. These tasks will require approximately US\$ 1,315,000 in funding. Colombia will continue to work to gain a clearer overview of the mine-affected territory with a view to making progress in meeting deadlines under article 5 of the Convention. In addition, Colombia has at all times underlined its willingness to inform the States parties, as necessary, on the progress made in the compilation of information on the presence of mines, in mine-clearance operations and in the development of land release instruments.

21. The third prong of the work strategy provides for a series of activities aimed at building technical and non-technical land-clearance capacity. As part of the effort to strengthen the State's humanitarian mine-clearance capacity, the number of squads is to be raised from 9 in 2011 to 18 in 2015 and to 25 in 2020. It should be borne in mind that the Government's estimates of national capacity and of the outside assistance required rest on the following suppositions: (i) the cost of mine-clearance operations conducted by civilian organizations will be similar to the cost of such operations when carried out by the armed forces; and (ii) the area to be cleared represents 40 per cent of the area covered by non-technical surveys. These estimates are not mere speculations but instead reflect the time estimates and results of actual humanitarian mine-clearance operations carried out under international supervision. Although these estimates are preliminary, they have provided a general picture of the situation and of what is needed in order to build capacity to deal with what is seen as a growing problem.

22. As long as illegal armed groups remain active, the resulting uncertainty will hamper the preparation of a detailed plan covering the entire period of 2011–2020. Colombia has therefore established specific plans for clearing land mined by illegal armed groups only for the first three years of the requested extension period. Between 2011 and 2013, the work outlined above is expected to help eliminate the existing threat in 14 municipalities. In these 14 municipalities, it is estimated that, using non-technical methods, a total of 9 million m² of land can be declared mine-free and 6 million m² of land can be cleared of mines at a cost of about US\$ 22 million. This plan takes full account of the fact that, for the time being, only Engineers Battalion No. 60 is authorized to carry out humanitarian mine clearance. Thus, in its request for an extension, Colombia has stated that it will proceed with operations within the limits of the State's capacity and that it will report on progress in operations carried out by civilian organizations (such as the allocation of areas) once the appropriate regulations are approved. This plan reflects the present situation and the legal options currently available to the State.

23. Given that the reasons for Colombia's extension request are based on preliminary estimates of areas suspected to contain mines, Colombia will design a specific transparency report module to facilitate follow-up of the extension request as part of the transparency reports that it regularly submits to the States parties using Form J.

24. Colombia requests that the States parties to the Convention grant it an extension of 10 years (to 1 March 2021) and is presenting an initial three-year action plan for working to meet its humanitarian mine-clearance commitments under article 5 of the Convention. The

nature of mine contamination in Colombia constitutes a true challenge in pursuing the goal of ridding the world of mines, given the complex new ways in which anti-personnel mines are being used and manufactured. As a result, the extension request submitted by Colombia provides for flexible measures suited to the particular situation created by the irregular actions of illegal armed groups in the State party, together with accountability mechanisms that the Government will use to show that it will do everything within its power in the coming 10 years to identify and destroy all minefields in its territory. The 10-year extension is not an arbitrary request on the part of the Colombian Government; it simply reflects the reality of the situation in Colombia, since it is impossible to say with any certainty when the use of anti-personnel mines by illegal armed groups will come to a definitive end. Conditions in a large part of the country are, however, conducive to progress in the recovery of mine-affected areas. The Government of Colombia considers that, within this 10-year period, it will be able to consolidate much of the work that it has done so far within the framework of the respect that Colombia has shown for the spirit of the Convention ever since it signed this important instrument.
