

# Landmine legacy in Azerbaijan: A threat to reconstruction and sustainable development

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The three-decade-long Armenia Azerbaijan conflict came to an end in 2023, but it left behind a hidden menace – the existence of landmines, particularly in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. These deadly remnants of war pose a significant threat to human rights, notably the right of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their homes and properties, but also rights to sustainable development and environmental protection, as well as to peace and stability throughout the entire South Caucasus region. This article aims to shed light on the impact of landmines and the importance of addressing this issue promptly. Furthermore, it emphasizes the strategic significance of rapid demining for post-conflict reconstruction in the South Caucasus and underscores the need for concerted efforts to ensure development, environmental protection, and stability in the region.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, environment, South Caucasus, landmines, reconstruction, sustainable development



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***Introduction***

The South Caucasus region, situated between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, has long been a vital geopolitical crossroads facilitating trade routes across the Eurasian continent. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus region underwent a pivotal change. Northern areas remained part of Russia while Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the Southern part gained their independence. This marked the South Caucasus as a distinct sub-region, recognized by major international players for its geo-economic and geopolitical importance, including in serving as a vital transit hub offering connectivity from the Caspian Sea to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus prevented this region from fully exploiting its transit and economic potential.

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engaging in construction, agriculture, and development work, as well as children and vulnerable populations. Furthermore, landmines baffle economic development by hindering and slowing post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Addressing the clearance of landmines will make it possible to create a safer environment for socioeconomic progress. It is therefore crucial to mitigate this humanitarian threat

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1 Bekiarova, N., "South Caucasus as a Region of strategic importance", *JASOS-International E-Journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, Vol. V, Issue 14, August 2019, p.1017.

and alleviate the suffering of affected individuals and communities.<sup>2</sup>

This article uses secondary sources, such as academic literature, reports from national and international organizations, and news articles, to provide a short analysis of the issue and offer insights into the implications of landmines for peace, reconstruction, and sustainable development in the country. It emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the participants in the conflict and the international community.

### ***Use of landmines in conflict areas and their impact on the environment and the development of affected areas***

Despite the potential damage from the use of booby traps and landmines in military conflicts, especially to civilians, and efforts by the international community to ban the use of landmines in this context, some countries still deploy landmines to inflict as much civilian damage as possible.

The strategic use of landmines in warfare significantly contributes to their enduring presence. Military doctrine views minefields as a cost-effective defence tactic, employed to disrupt enemy offensives, impede troop movement, and protect critical territory.<sup>3</sup> Such minefields utilize both anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, designed to cripple the opposing side's vehicles and inflict casualties on their soldiers. This defensive strategy could, ideally, be implemented with minimal civilian casualties, as minefields can be laid in advance and meticulously mapped. However, historical evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that this is rarely the case. The widespread deployment of landmines throughout history, evident from World War II through to contemporary conflicts, is a key factor in the global challenge of landmine contamination.

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2 Bent, C. and Safikhanov, H., "Azerbaijan's Landmine Victims: Realities and Challenges", *Journal of Mine Action*, Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 11, 2008.

3 Joint Publication 3-15, "Barriers, obstacles, and mine warfare for Joint Operations", *Joint Force Development, Joint Chief of Staff*, USA, September 6, 2016.

vast swathes of agricultural land unusable, hindering potential food production and exacerbating existing economic hardships. This, in turn, disrupts the reconstruction process and delays the return of displaced populations to their homes in the post-conflict period.

Land degradation caused by mine explosions further impedes agricultural revival by disrupting soil composition and micro-relief, hindering vital sectors such as agriculture.<sup>4</sup> According to some scholars, “denial of access is one of the most serious problems associated with the use of landmines, as it prohibits the access of vital resources for the support of life (e.g. water)”.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, it might be part of a strategy to include landmines to inflict future damage to the affected territories. In fact, the “simple presence of a single mine can discourage the development of agricultural work or the flow of water or food supplies that are strictly necessary.”<sup>6</sup>

The presence of landmines hinders the reconstruction of essential services such as schools and hospitals, delaying the return to normality and exacerbating hardships for communities. Furthermore, landmine explosions can cause significant environmental damage, leading to biodiversity loss and chemical contamination.<sup>7</sup> These long-term consequences highlight the strategic intent behind landmine use – inflicting not only immediate military damage (e.g. disabling tanks), but also causing long-term societal and environmental disruption.

### ***The case of Azerbaijan: Background and context***

The [former] Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict originated from the former’s territorial claims against the latter. Dating back to around 1988, these intensified after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (when Azerbaijan and Armenia became independent states) and culminated in the First Karabakh War, during which Armenia occupied roughly 20% of

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4 Frost, A., “Mitigating the Environmental Impacts of Explosive Ordnance and Land Release”, *Mine Action Review*, JMU Scholarly Commons, Global CWD Repository, 2021

5 Berhe A.A., “The contribution of landmines to land degradation”, *Land Degradation & Development*, Volume 18, Issue 1 January-February: pp. 1–15, 2007.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Njeri S., “Mine Action and the Environment. The ‘Triple vulnerability’ - Climate, Conflict and Contamination; the humanitarian implications of intersecting climate, conflict risk and contamination from mines and UXOs2”, *paper presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and UN Advisers (NDM-UN23)*, Geneva, 2020.

Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territory.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, about 700,000 Azerbaijanis were forcibly displaced from the then-occupied territories.<sup>9</sup> Despite efforts by international organizations and major powers to resolve the conflict over many years, progress remained elusive until the outbreak of the Second Karabakh War in 2020, which ended after 44 days with the Trilateral Statement of November 10, 2020.<sup>10</sup> In September 2023, Azerbaijan conducted anti-terror measures in the Karabakh region to disarm illegal Armenian armed formations. These ended with the dissolution of the separatist regime previously established in, and supported by, Armenia in the region.<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath of both the 44-day war in 2020 and the September anti-terror operations in 2023, Azerbaijan embarked on large-scale demining activities to clear the region which was filled with landmines left behind by Armenia's armed forces.<sup>12</sup>

*Following the 1994 ceasefire that ended the First Karabakh War, a 900-kilometer line of contact separating the occupied territories from Azerbaijan proper was filled with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines.*

### ***Landmines and the UXO issue***

Azerbaijan faces a significant challenge, as there are an estimated one million landmines and items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) present in the region.<sup>13</sup> According to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, clearing all the landmines in the region would require 30 years and \$25 billion.<sup>14</sup> Among other things, the lack of complete mine maps is hindering the ongoing reconstruction and rehabilitation work in

8 President.az, "Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict", Official website of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Available at: <https://president.az/en/pages/view/azerbaijan/karabakh> (Accessed: June 13, 2024).

9 Isayev, T., "Return of Azerbaijani immigrants to their lands according to the ceasefire agreement signed after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war", *Inonu University Law Review*, 14(1), 2024, p. 153-165.

10 President.az, "Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict", *op.cit.*

11 *Ibid.*

12 Torelli C., Landmines in Azerbaijan continue to pose a lethal threat to peace and development, *Action on Armed Violence*, June 22, 2023, Available at: <https://aoav.org.uk/2023/landmines-in-azerbaijan-continue-to-pose-a-lethal-threat-to-peace-and-development/> (Accessed: June 13, 2024).

13 Shiryev Z., "Defusing Azerbaijan's Landmine Challenge", *International Crisis Group*, Commentary / Europe & Central Asia, May 31, 2023, Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/azerbaijan/defusing-azerbajians-landmine-challenge> (Accessed: April 12, 2024).

14 Eurasianet, *The mammoth task of demining Azerbaijan*, September 11, 2023, Available at: <https://eurasianet.org/the-mammoth-task-of-demining-azerbaijan> (Accessed: April 12, 2024).

the liberated territories and preventing the safe and early return of approximately 700,000 displaced Azerbaijani citizens. It is impeding their ability to rebuild homes, cultivate land, and freely travel within their territory.

Following the 1994 ceasefire that ended the First Karabakh War, a 900-kilometer line of contact separating the occupied territories from Azerbaijan proper was filled with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. In the aftermath of the 1994 cease-fire accord, Azerbaijani military engineers started mine clearance operations, especially in the Fizuli and Aghdam districts, removing almost 19,000 anti-tank and 22,000 anti-personnel mines.<sup>15</sup> Most of the minefields were situated along the Armenian border with Azerbaijan and across the former line of contact, as well as in areas around and in front of fortifications and outposts installed by Armenia's armed forces during the occupation period. Armenia recognized that numerous parties had used mines in the border area and adjacent territories without recording or marking the mined areas during the 1988-1994 conflict.<sup>16</sup> According to a landmine impact survey (LIS) conducted by the Survey Action Center (SAC) and the International Eurasia Press Fund (IEPF) in 2003, 18 out of the 65 districts in Azerbaijan were found to be contaminated by landmines and UXO,<sup>17</sup> the majority in the Fuzuli and Aghstafa districts. However, the survey did not cover the (at that time) occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, or certain other areas where the military restricted access.

After 20 years of occupation, the contamination increased exponentially. Furthermore, contrary to the Trilateral Statement signed on November 10, 2020, Armenia, in the presence of Russian peacekeepers, seems to have continued mine deployment activities in the border districts and the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.<sup>18</sup> Those activities perpetrated by

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15 Human Rights Watch Reports, together with International Campaign to ban landmines and Landmine Monitor, "Europe/Central Asia Non-Signatories", 1999, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/landmine/WEBEUR3.html> (Accessed: May 6, 2024).

16 Berikashvili, N. "The role of the OSCE mission in the South Caucasus regarding weapon and landmine issue", *Helsinki Monitor*, 16(2), 2005, p.132-142

17 Cluster Munition Monitor, "Azerbaijan", 2005, available at: <http://archives.themonitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2005/azerbaijan.html> (Accessed: April 12, 2024).

18 Galvin G., "Azerbaijan demands UN action as Nagorno-Karabakh landmine row escalates", Eurasianet, December 12, 2022, Available at: <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-demands-un-action-as-nagorno-karabakh-landmine-row-escalates> (Accessed: May 6, 2024).

Azerbaijan’s neighbouring country subsequently created challenges for achieving peace and stability and building trust in the region, as they restricted people’s freedom of movement and impeded the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homelands. According to a report by Azerbaijan’s National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA), between the liberation of the territories in 2020 after the end of the conflict and March 2023, ANAMA and its partners cleared an area of 746 km<sup>2</sup> of mines and ERW (Explosive Remnants of War, consisting of UXO and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO)) – 9% of the total contaminated area.<sup>19</sup> This is why, in 2023, ANAMA reported that it would prioritize surveying suspected mined areas to gain a better understanding of the extent of the contamination.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Challenges and implications of landmines in the UN SDG framework***

The presence of landmines, besides posing a threat to the lives of hundreds of thousands of citizens expected to resettle in the liberated areas, hinders efforts towards post-conflict reconstruction and sustainable development. Notably, the contamination impedes the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN in 2015. The 17 SDGs form an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership that recognizes that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth. As some reports recognize,<sup>21</sup> one of the most important limits to realizing this ambitious vision lies in post-conflict areas, where conflict has ravaged communities and left behind the dangers of mines, cluster munitions, and other remnants of warfare. Other studies show how mine clearance engages with the SDGs and helps movement

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19 Mine Action Review, “Clearing the mines 2023 – Azerbaijan”, Available at: [https://www.mineactionreview.org/assets/downloads/Azerbaijan\\_Clearing\\_the\\_Mines\\_2023.pdf](https://www.mineactionreview.org/assets/downloads/Azerbaijan_Clearing_the_Mines_2023.pdf) (Accessed: May 6, 2024)

20 International Campaign to Ban Landmines, “Landmine Monitor 2023”, 2023, p.50, Available at: [https://backend.icblcmc.org/assets/reports/Landmine-Monitors/LMM2023/Downloads/Landmine-Monitor-2023\\_web.pdf](https://backend.icblcmc.org/assets/reports/Landmine-Monitors/LMM2023/Downloads/Landmine-Monitor-2023_web.pdf) (Accessed: May 6, 2024)

21 Hofmann U., (GICHD) and Juergensen O. (UNDP), “Leaving no one behind: mine action and the sustainable development goals”, *Geneva International center for Humanitarian Demining*, GICHD-UNDP, June 2017, Available at: [https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/uploads/gichd/Publications/Leaving\\_no\\_one\\_behind-Mine\\_Action\\_and\\_SDGs.pdf](https://www.gichd.org/fileadmin/uploads/gichd/Publications/Leaving_no_one_behind-Mine_Action_and_SDGs.pdf) (Accessed: May 6, 2024).

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towards improvements in agricultural production, trade and access to markets, and social and physical infrastructure.<sup>22</sup>

There are several reasons why it is challenging to achieve the SDGs in Azerbaijani territories affected by mines. The first is the humanitarian impact, as landmines cause casualties and injuries, particularly among civilians. According to statistics received from ANAMA,<sup>23</sup> between 1991 and July 1, 2024, 3,448 Azerbaijani people lost their lives because of landmines planted by Armenia. Since the end of the Second Karabakh War in 2020, 69 Azerbaijanis have been killed and 300 people have received injuries due to landmine explosions (as of July 1, 2024).<sup>24</sup> Among the 69 victims killed, only 15 were soldiers and the remaining 54 were civilians.<sup>25</sup> This creates a direct barrier to achieving SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being, as well as impacting other goals related to reducing inequalities (SDG 10); promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16); and fostering partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).

Landmines not only harm individuals and societies, they also have long-term effects on the environment, such as contaminating land and water sources. According to preliminary data, there are 147,988 hectares of highly contaminated land, and a further 675,570 hectares are considered to have medium and low mine pollution.<sup>26</sup> Explosive remnants and improvised explosive devices made from landmines have

22 Ikpe E., and Njeri, S., “Mine clearance, peacebuilding and development: interactions between sustainable development goals and infrastructure in Angola”, *Peacebuilding Journal*, April 22, 2024, Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21647259.2024.2335427> (Accessed: May 6, 2024).

23 Trend News Agency, *Azerbaijani ANAMA discloses number of mine victims*, April 4, 2024, Available at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/3881623.html> (Accessed: April 12, 2024); Data from: ANAMA’s Quarterly Report “Mine Action in Azerbaijan: Priorities and Needs”, January 2023.

24 Torelli, *op.cit.*

25 Data from official website of Azerbaijan National Mine Agency (ANAMA), Available at: <https://anama.gov.az/en/enlightenment-works> (Accessed: April 19, 2024).

26 Watson N., “Azerbaijan Faces Huge De-Mining Challenge with Little Help from the West”, *NJ.Com*, March 20, 2024, Available at: <https://www.nj.com/opinion/2024/03/azerbaijan-faces-huge-de-mining-challenge-with-little-help-from-the-west.html> (Accessed: April 12, 2024); Data from: Mine Action Review, “Clearing The Mine 2023 - Azerbaijan”, 2023, [https://www.mineactionreview.org/assets/downloads/Azerbaijan\\_Clearing\\_the\\_Mines\\_2023.pdf](https://www.mineactionreview.org/assets/downloads/Azerbaijan_Clearing_the_Mines_2023.pdf)



also been found in water basins and on trees. This consequently affects progress towards SDGs related to life on land (SDG 15) and clean water and sanitation (SDG 6). Moreover, landmines inhibit agricultural activities, infrastructure development, and economic growth in affected areas. This creates barriers to achieving SDGs related to decent work and economic growth (SDG 8); industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9); as well as sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). The presence of landmines poses a significant challenge to Azerbaijan's efforts to promote agricultural sustainability and renewable energy as a means of diversifying to a non-oil economy and attracting foreign investment.

### *Strategies for resolution*

The presence of the landmines in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan is a “passive battle” that constitutes a silent yet devastating form of conflict that will continue to inflict harm long after active hostilities ceased. Therefore, the pursuit of stability and peace in the region requires international support and collaboration to deal with this issue.

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The government of Azerbaijan considers humanitarian mine action a national priority. From 2020 to April 2023, nearly 7% per cent of contaminated land has been cleared, including high, medium, and low-threat areas.<sup>27</sup> However, the scope of the issue is massive, and the availability of resources is limited. This highlights the importance of engaging international partners along with national agencies to achieve visible progress and conducting feasibility studies and surveys to accelerate mine clearance.

The exchange of landmine maps is a crucial factor in accelerating post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction work. Ben Keith, a lawyer working on issues of post-conflict human rights, believes that “the exchange of land mine maps should take greater importance in post-conflict related discussions” and that “they should be part of any truce; otherwise, conflicts will continue to kill long after military combat has ended.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Shiryev, *op.cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Hammond J., “From Ukraine To Yemen, Land Mines Can Devastate Investors Too”, *Forbes/Zenger News*, April 4, 2024. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/>

*Armenia should not shy away from its responsibilities but should assist Azerbaijan in the latter's efforts to demine the liberated areas.*

While Armenia provided some maps to Azerbaijan, concerns regarding their accuracy persist.<sup>29</sup> Armenia should not shy away from its responsibilities but should assist Azerbaijan in the latter's efforts to demine the liberated areas. This might also serve as a perfect confidence-building step between the two countries. Such a gesture would also have genuine humanitarian value – the demining of the contaminated territories will pave the way for the safe development of cross-border infrastructure projects and trade relations with Azerbaijan. Such economic interdependence of the two countries, established naturally, could contribute to the consolidation of stability and an environment of peace in the region. In the future, this could develop into regional economic and political integration, with the additional participation of Georgia.

It has also been argued that Azerbaijan's accession to the 'Ottawa Convention' (the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction) could significantly enhance its prospects for international support and create a conducive atmosphere for donor engagement in Azerbaijan. However, the convention focuses specifically on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines. Its scope does not include anti-tank mines, command-action mines or cluster mines, cluster munitions, or improvised explosive devices, which Azerbaijan's liberated territories also contain.

Moreover, geopolitical dynamics complicate Azerbaijan's potential accession to the Ottawa Convention. Even key global powers are absent from the convention. Daryl Kimball of the Arms Control Association highlights that major producers and users of landmines, including the United States, China, and Russia, have not signed the Convention, and neither has Armenia.<sup>30</sup> This raises questions about the efficacy and universality of the convention in comprehensively addressing the issue of landmines.

Nevertheless, even without being signatories to the Ottawa Convention,

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zengernews/2024/04/04/on-world-landmine-day-a-new-shift-in-strategy-toward-mine-victims-is-forming/?sh=599e07b86dba (Accessed: April 12, 2024)

29 Torelli, *op.cit.*

30 Kimball D., "Fact Sheet", Arms Control Association, 2022, Available at: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/ottawasigs> (Accessed: April 12, 2024).

affected countries should receive the necessary support. For instance, the UNGA's biennial resolution on "Assistance in Mine Action" does not distinguish between Ottawa Convention signatory or non-signatory states when urging the provision of necessary assistance to mine-affected states. Rather, assisting mine-contaminated countries is an act of humanitarian significance. Albeit Azerbaijan was able to mobilize some funding for and technical assistance to its national mine action, the extent of the contaminated territories nevertheless necessitates further financial and technical support.

Indeed, financial support from external donors is a very important element in addition to maps and an international institutional framework. The reconstruction effort is already very costly, but demining increases that cost. The problem is that mine clearance is often not a priority for donors. Some scholars argue that an innovative solution to mitigate the impact of landmines could involve the establishment of a new UN fund modelled after the successful UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, which has supported over 50,000 individuals with various forms of aid.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the US State Department has funded the training of a demining team<sup>32</sup> and the UNDP has contributed to some projects. Although the UNDP is the main external actor managing mine action in Azerbaijan, the EU is considered one of the most important donors providing assistance for mine action in the country. In fact, the EU, with a financial contribution of €4.25 million,<sup>33</sup> is the largest international donor. It is equipped with the necessary tools to cover all key aspects of mine clearance, risk education, victim assistance, stockpile destruction, capacity building, mine detection, and mine clearance technology research and development.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, in May 2024, the EU launched the "Team Europe Initiative on Mine Action" in Azerbaijan to strengthen

31 Hammond J., *op.cit.*

32 US Embassy in Azerbaijan, "Training for state department funded demining teams kicks off", June 16, 2023. Available at: <https://az.usembassy.gov/anama-terter/#:~:text=To%20promote%20regional%20peace%20and,four%2014%2Dperson%20demining%20teams%2C> (Accessed on May 6, 2024)

33 UNDP Azerbaijan, "European Union funded project for mine action kicks off in Azerbaijan", February 8, 2023, Available at: <https://www.undp.org/azerbaijan/press-releases/european-union-funded-project-mine-action-kicks-azerbaijan> (Accessed on May 6, 2024)

34 Council of the EU, "Ottawa Convention: Council addresses the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war", Press release, February 19, 2021, Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/02/19/ottawa-convention-council-addresses-the-threat-of-mines-and-explosive-remnants-of-war/> (Accessed on April 12, 2024).

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ANAMA's work, raise mine awareness, and support victims. As the EU delegation to Azerbaijan said: "Clearing explosive hazards will facilitate the safe return of internally displaced persons and promote sustainable communities."<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, in 2023, ANAMA, UNDP, and the EU launched a project funded by the EU Commission to address contamination by mines and unexploded ordnance. This included establishing two all-female demining teams in Azerbaijan, thus also helping to increase the role women play in mine action.<sup>36</sup>

Apart from the EU, other support in clearing landmines comes from Belgium's APOPO and the UK's MAG, which launched a project with UNDP and the International Eurasia Press Fund (an Azerbaijani NGO), again with funding from EU, to mitigate the landmine threat in the country.<sup>37</sup>

Landmine issues are so complex that they emphasize the importance of cooperation among donor countries, diplomatic missions, academic experts, scientists, activists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All play crucial roles in mobilizing resources, raising awareness, and advocating for policies that prioritize landmine clearance and victim assistance. Therefore, by communicating regarding the situation and rallying international support, Azerbaijan can enhance its operational capacity, expand its reach, and accelerate progress towards a landmine-free future.

### ***Conclusions***

In the aftermath of the new reality established in the South Caucasus, most notably with Azerbaijan reclaiming its sovereignty over its

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35 EU NeighboursEast, *Team Europe launches Mine Action in Azerbaijan*, May 6, 2024, Available at: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/team-europe-launches-mine-action-in-azerbaijan/> (Accessed: June 13, 2024).

36 EU Commission, Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, "Transformative impacts of FPI projects: empowering women globally", March 8, 2024, Available at: [https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/stories/transformational-impacts-fpi-projects-empowering-women-globally\\_en](https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/stories/transformational-impacts-fpi-projects-empowering-women-globally_en) (Accessed April 12, 2024)

37 Apopo, "APOPO Assists Azerbaijan in Clearing Landmines in Post-Conflict Scenario", August 9, 2023, Available at: <https://apopo.org/latest/apopo-assists-azerbaijan/?v=5b79c40fa7c2> (Accessed on May 6, 2024)

formerly occupied territories, a concealed peril has been unveiled: landmines. These lethal vestiges of war endanger not only basic human rights but also environmental integrity while casting a shadow over peace, stability, and development across the entire South Caucasus region. Mines continue to pose a threat to civilians and hinder post-conflict reconstruction efforts, as they create a complex web of challenges that directly impede the achievement of various SDGs in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. Therefore, addressing landmine issues is crucial for advancing sustainable development, promoting environmental protection, and ensuring the well-being of affected populations.

Addressing the issue of landmines is not merely a matter of regional concern but a fundamental human rights imperative and a prerequisite for stability and peace. The passive nature of landmine warfare underscores the urgency of international support in mitigating its devastating impact on communities and individuals. By prioritizing human rights, promoting regional stability, and providing steadfast support to national entities such as ANAMA, the international community can collectively work towards eradicating the scourge of landmines and ensuring a safer, more secure future for all.

Peace and stability in the South Caucasus are essential for sustaining regional economic cooperation and promoting prosperity. By prioritizing diplomatic engagement, reconstruction, and economic cooperation, regional stakeholders and global powers can work together to safeguard the South Caucasus as a beacon of peace, stability, and sustainable development.