

ICBL Comments on Extension Requests - Thailand, 26 November 2008

The ICBL has found that the key factors that have prevented Thailand from far greater progress in clearance operations in the last 10 years, and which may continue to pose obstacles, are political instability and indifference. Budget cuts by the Supreme Command in 2005 forced TMAC to cut manpower by half, severely curtailing survey and clearance. Financial constraints over the years have also limited TMAC's ability to employ competent data management staff. The responsibility does not lie with TMAC but with the Armed Forces Supreme Command and successive governments that have not prioritized humanitarian demining and have not given mine action the support needed to fulfill Thailand's obligations under the treaty. After some two years of debate, the government has yet to reconstitute TMAC as a civilian agency that would make it at least eligible for funding from some international donor agencies that will not fund a military entity. Until that happens, timelines for tackling Thailand's remaining mine contamination remains speculative.

While recognizing the legitimate need for Thailand to be granted more time to demine its territory, we believe that Thailand still needs to provide more clarity on the following points:

1. Data on demining results and productivity (for example, the request lists an average yearly clearance productivity of about 50km², whereas it only reports clearing a total of 56.1km² in 2000–2008.);
2. The feasibility of the timelines TMAC has suggested for dealing with remaining contamination within the period of the requested extension. The request estimated Thailand had 528km² of "real minefields." Despite the low annual clearance rates in past years, the request suggests annual clearance will climb from 43.07km² in 2009 to 64.71km² in 2016. Given past productivity, achieving these results would therefore only be feasible if achieved through methods other than manual clearance, meaning that TMAC would have to continue to identify large areas to release through the LMP.
3. Whether the predicted budget needs are realistic and the source and direction of funds. Significant funding has been allocated from the national budget for 2009, which is very good news, but longer term funding will still be needed to support the demining program.

Finally, in addition to regular reporting on the benchmarks set out in the request, we encourage Thailand to report on the progress of TMAC's transition to a civilian agency given the importance of this change to meeting Thailand's ambitious demining plans.

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