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Written Testimony of Representative Jim Himes

House Committee on Appropriations

June 22, 2020

Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, distinguished Members of the Committee:

I would like to encourage continued support for the USAID humanitarian demining program in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is the sole program responsible for providing humanitarian demining assistance to the region. Absent our support in the FY21 budget, the program will be unable to continue.

Nagorno-Karabakh is considered one of the most heavily mined regions of the former Soviet Union. Mines were laid from 1991-1994 by both Azerbaijani and Armenian forces during the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Unfortunately, significant landmine contamination in Karabakh continues to threaten the civilian population.

Most people living in mine-affected areas in Nagorno-Karabakh are dependent on the land for their livelihoods.ⁱ Mines impede use of land, roads, and other areas, and affect the rural population in particular, whose main income is from herding animals and farming.ⁱⁱ The bulk of the remaining antipersonnel mine threat in Nagorno-Karabakh is located in wooded hillsides

between former Armenian and Azerbaijani military positions. As such, the most vulnerable population of Karabakhis are men, women, and children who are engaged in woodcutting, hunting, and foraging.

USAID's demining program has already benefited over 80% of the local population and provided the opportunity for thousands of families to use their land productively. A 2017 study from the University of Southern California (USC) into the effects of landmines on livelihoods shows a direct relationship between mines and economic development. According to the analysis of survey data gathered by HALO from over 200 rural households, "the presence of landmines causes, on average, a 45% decrease in overall household economic welfare among the rural population of Nagorno Karabakh."ⁱⁱⁱ However, significant landmine contamination remains. Residents, as recently as this month, come across explosive hazards in their everyday lives.

Demining in Nagorno Karabakh also helps prepare populations in this fragile region for peace, by removing remnants of war and by providing Armenia, Nagorno Karabakh, and Azerbaijan with an objective around which to build trust. These entities convene under the Landmine Free South Caucasus initiative, the only regional effort in the world to work toward mine-free status. Thus, demining plays a unique role in this region in supporting peace.

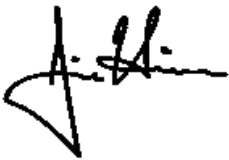
I respectfully request the committee include the following provisions in the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill:

- Of the funds appropriated by the Act, not less than \$1.5 million shall be made available to fund demining and landmine risk education programs in Nagorno Karabakh.

- Provide robust funding for Nagorno Karabakh based regional rehabilitation services for survivors of landmine injuries and individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Himes', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Jim Himes

Member of Congress

ⁱHALO Trust, “Where we work,” undated.

ⁱⁱ USAID, “De-mining Needs Assessment in Nagorno-Karabakh,” September 2013, p. 3.

ⁱⁱⁱ HALO Trust, “The Economic Impact of Landmines In Nagorno-Karabakh: Estimating Causal Effects Using Instrumental Variables,” July 2017.