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Written Testimony of Congresswoman Judy Chu

House Committee on Appropriations

June 22, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chairwoman

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member

House Appropriations Committee

House Appropriations Committee

H-305, The Capitol

1016 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

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

I submit this written testimony in strong support of the life-saving humanitarian demining program managed by USAID and implemented by The HALO Trust in Nagorno Karabakh.

Without continued support in the FY21 budget, this program, responsible for providing the only humanitarian demining assistance in Karabakh, will be forced to cease operations.

Karabakh has experienced one of the world's highest mine-accident rates, with per capita casualty rates, at times, at levels comparable those of Iraq or Cambodia. A quarter of these

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casualties have been children. Unfortunately, significant landmine contamination in Karabakh continues to threaten innocent civilians, which is why this funding from USAID is so critical.

I have seen first-hand the importance of this program while visiting Nagorno Karabakh last year. USAID's demining program has been responsible for destroying nearly 61,000 landmines and explosive hazards and has transformed over 33,000 acres of former minefield and battlefield into land available for productive use and recreation. Further, every child that has attended school in Karabakh since 2003 has also received mine risk education made possible by this program.

Despite this demonstrated progress, tragically, USAID support for this program has expired, and no future funding is planned. **The U.S. is the only government donor to this program, and without funding in the FY21 budget, this program will be draw to a close.** Given that USAID provides the only demining aid in the region, the closure of this program will doom families to live near minefields indefinitely.

On June 12th, 2020, an 11-year-old boy dug up a submunition, launched during the 2016 conflict, in his family's garden. Fortunately, because he had received U.S.-funded mine risk education, he identified the device as dangerous and notified his parents. The family contacted The HALO Trust, and HALO destroyed the item the very next day in addition to fencing off the garden area

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for further inspection. The threat from unexploded mines in Nagorno Karabakh is immediate, and the need for continued support for this program.

To promote peace and security in this region, I respectfully urge the committee to include the following provisions in the FY2021 State and Foreign Operations bill:

- \$10 million to fund demining and landmine risk education programs in Nagorno Karabakh.
- 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 cursive script that reads "Judy Chu".

Judy Chu

Member of Congress