

House Committee on Appropriations: Member Day Hearing, June 22, 2020

Statement for the Record – Congressman TJ Cox (CA-21)

I would like to highlight the importance of the life-saving humanitarian demining program in Nagorno Karabakh, managed by USAID. The creation of a \$10 million budget line under the Economic Support Fund (ESF) to support demining efforts is crucial to protect communities from landmines and unexploded ordnance. About a quarter of landmine accidents in Nagorno Karabakh have been children, suffering one of the worst mine accident rates in the world with nearly 400 civilian casualties since 1994. USAID's demining program has eliminated nearly 4,000 landmines and over 57,000 items of unexploded ordnance. The funding for this program expired in March 2020, meaning this life-saving demining program will be forced to close in the coming months if continued support is not allocated in the FY21 foreign aid bill. This program provides the only humanitarian demining support in the region. If the program draws down, families will be forced to live with the threat of landmines indefinitely. This makes it especially imperative that we secure continued financial support. The question of promoting peace and stability in the Caucasus region should not be controversial. Demining in Nagorno Karabakh is especially important to the many Armenian-Americans in the United States, as well as my home district in California's Central Valley. Therefore, I urge the Subcommittee to include the following bill language under the Economic Support Fund for Nagorno Karabakh:

“Of the funds appropriated by this Act, not less than \$10,000,000 shall be made available to 1) fund demining and landmine risk education programs in Nagorno Karabakh, and 2) support Nagorno Karabakh-based regional rehabilitation services for survivors of landmine injuries and other individuals with physical and cognitive disabilities.”