

Written Testimony of Representative John Garamendi (CA-03)

House Committee on Appropriations

June 22, 2020

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

I would like to urge support for the life-saving humanitarian demining program managed by USAID 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 close.

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 casualties have been children. Unfortunately, significant landmine contamination in Karabakh continues to threaten innocent civilians.

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.

Despite this 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 drawn 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.

To promote peace and security in this region, I respectfully urge the committee to include the following provisions in the foreign aid 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.**
- **We further request that the committee 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,



JOHN GARAMENDI

Member of Congress