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Third Continental Conference of African Experts on Anti-Personnel Landmines

Statement by the Presidency of the European Union

9 September 2009

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

It is an honour to take the floor on behalf of the Presidency of the European Union.

The European Union has a long history of support for the universalization and implementation of the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction – or Ottawa Convention.

This unwavering support was reaffirmed in June 2008 when the Member States of the European Union adopted a Joint Action in support of the Convention.

Through this Joint Action, funds have been made available to support South Africa in convening this important continental conference and in supporting up to five other States Parties to the Convention in convening regional events in advance of the Convention's Second Review Conference later this year.

Over the course of this year, three workshops have already taken place with EU support – in Nicaragua, Thailand and Tajikistan. These were extremely successful in ensuring that States, on a regional basis, could offer their input on and prepare for the Convention's Second Review Conference – the Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World.

I have every confidence that this Continental Conference will also be a success.

I should note as well that the EU Joint Action foresees that up to 25 short term technical advisory missions are undertaken to assist States Parties in addressing implementation challenges. Already nine of these missions have taken place to Afghanistan, Uganda (two visits), Sudan, Chad, Zambia, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Haiti covering a wide range of topics – from victim assistance to mine clearance.

The Ottawa Convention is comprehensive in that it seeks to end, for all people for all time, the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines.

The Convention does not aim for half-measures.

Rather, the Convention sees that the international community has agreed that the promise of ending the suffering forever will only be achieved if all mines are destroyed, if all mined areas are cleared, if all victims are assisted and if all States abide by the norms embodied by the Convention.

The European Union stands behind this instrument and hopes that this Continental Conference will be an important step in both advancing the universalization and implementation aims of the States Parties.

I hope that the States Parties in Africa will make good use of this conference to share experiences in clearing mined areas and assisting the victims. And we hope that those States of the region that have not yet joined our common cause will be encouraged by this conference to proceed with their accession processes.

We commend South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation, the Commission of the African Union and the Institute for Security Studies for having worked tirelessly to prepare this workshop. In addition, we thank the AP Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit for serving as technical implementer of the EU's Joint Action in support of the Convention.

Not only do we hope that this conference will ensure additional steps are taken toward a mine-free world, but we also hope that you will see our support for your conference in the context of the broader EU-Africa partnership.

The EU-Africa Strategy provides a strong link for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Africa at political and technical levels. Together we have decided to use the enormous potential of our partnership to jointly find answers to the common challenges of today's globalised world.

With that said, I wish you all the best for a successful conference.