

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF THE
DEADLINE FOR COMPLETING THE DESTRUCTION OF ANTI-
PERSONNEL MINES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 5 OF THE
CONVENTION**

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Madame President, I congratulate you upon your appointment. I thank you for availing Uganda the opportunity to submit an extension request on Article 5.

The mine problem in Uganda originates from civil conflicts and wars that have taken place in the country over the past two decades, mainly in the North, North East, West Nile and the Rwenzori sub-regions in Western Uganda. The conflicts over the last decades resulted in the displacement of two million people at its peak with conflicting parties employing a variety of ammunition and mines, causing some of the population to fear falling victim to mines and other explosive remnants of war.

As peace returned to the area it was necessary to ensure the safety of returnees by clearing land of the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance. In order to address this challenge in Uganda, a National Mine Action Programme was established in 2005, implemented through the Office of the Prime Minister with support from United Nations Development Programme.

The overall objective of the National Mine Action Programme was to create an enabling environment for peace and resettlement, re-integration and socioeconomic recovery of conflict affected populations by developing the management and technical capacity of the Uganda Mine Action Centre; improving the safety of mine affected communities through mine risk education to reduce the risks of accidents due to landmines and Unexploded Ordnance; meeting the needs of landmine survivors; and, contributing to the growth of the economy of Uganda by returning cleared land to communities for productive use.

During the period 2006-2007, needs assessment conducted identified 427 suspected hazardous areas in northern and western Uganda. However, this survey was inaccurate and could not be used for appropriate operational planning. In particular, this survey did not specify the actual threat of landmines. As a result Uganda Mine Action Centre carried out verification surveys to all the suspected areas. Only one of these 427 areas, at Agoro Mountains bordering Sudan, was identified as mined and the remaining contained other unexploded ordnance or were not contaminated at all.

In November 2008, Uganda Mine Action Centre carried out a general mine action assessment with assistance from Uganda People's Defence Force and Danish Demining Group. Through this mine action assessment, the area identified by in Agoro Mountains on the Uganda-Sudan border was confirmed as mined. This area is sub-divided into five minefields, namely Agoro 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 with an approximate total size of 130,000 square metres.

In January 2009, another general mine action assessment was carried out on the Uganda-Sudan border leading to the identification of a second mined area in Ngomoromo; with a total size of 140,000 square metres.

The clearance operations began in 2006 with a small national capacity of four teams consisting of Uganda People's Defence Force and Uganda Police Force personnel, expanding the capacity to twelve teams in 2008 with assistance from Danish Demining Group. The command and coordination for all demining operations is carried out by Regional Mine Action Centre based in Gulu, northern Uganda, while the Kampala Centre provides the overall coordination and strategic planning.

Clearance work from 2006 to 2008 mainly involved explosive ordnance disposal resulting in the destruction of unexploded ordnance and few mines. By July 2009, 304 of the 428 suspected areas had been cleared resulting in the destruction of 61 anti-personnel mines, 12 anti-tank mines, 5,323 items unexploded ordnance, and 19,553 small arms ammunition. Additionally, a total of 35 suspected areas have been discredited and 89 are pending clearance of unexploded ordnance. It is important to note that 36 of the 61 mines recovered and destroyed are associated with the two areas identified as mined and the remaining 24 mines destroyed are nuisance mines.

To date, one of the five mined areas undergoing technical survey in Agoro measuring approximately 30,000 square metres has been confirmed containing mines and is being cleared. As of July 2009, a total of 3,180.5 square metres had been cleared culminating in the destruction of 13 mines of type 72. The initiation of a technical survey to confirm the presence of mines is pending for the remaining four mined areas in Agoro. The extent of these is approximately 100,000 square metres.

In the Ngomoromo technical survey and clearance are ongoing in the mined area measuring approximately 140,000 square metres. As of July 2009 a total of 2,874 square metres had been cleared culminating in the destruction of 23 mines of type PMD 6. The extent of the remaining area to be cleared is approximately 137,126 square metres.

At completion of the technical survey in the Agoro Mountains and Ngomoromo mined areas, area reduction may result in a smaller area requiring clearance. However, until then, the calculation of the duration of the clearance is being made on the basis that 100 percent of the assessed total size of the areas is to be cleared.

Briefly, the following factors affected Uganda's earlier obligation of August 1st Deadline 2009 under the Article Five.

- i. **Late commencement of clearance operations:** Uganda signed the Ottawa Convention in 1997 and ratified it in 1999. While Uganda was expected to start identifying and addressing all mined areas in her jurisdiction at this time, this did not happen until 2006 upon the establishment of the mine action programme and establishment of a clearance team.
- ii. **Security:** The uncertainty caused by the continuous Lord's Resistance Army rebel attacks on the civilian population affected clearance operations in the affected areas. Actual clearance only began in 2006 when the government forces decisively repulsed the rebels from the affected districts.
- iii. **Resources:** Both material and human resources are required to successfully clear the identified mined areas. The inadequacy in the supply of these resources greatly impeded Uganda's Article 5 clearance obligations. Likewise, funding for material

resources, equipment, among other requirements, has been insufficient. This situation is aggravated by the fact that not many international mine action partners have been active in Uganda except Danish Demining Group, which began operations in 2008.

- iv. **Operational problems:** A multiplicity of operational and management challenges contributed to the further delay in commencing the clearance of the mined areas.
- v. **Meteorological issues:** Unfavourable weather conditions such as heavy rainfall, leading to flooding and thick vegetation curtail the pace of demining work.

In light of the above circumstances as well as the work pending, Uganda is requesting a total of three years to fulfil its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention.

The remaining mine contamination challenge for Uganda, is being dealt with continued technical survey, subsequent clearance and planned mechanical clearance in 2010 accompanied by increased demining personnel. Negotiations have been finalised with Norwegian People's Aid to provide Minewolf machine to be deployed in January 2010 at Ngomoromo.

Uganda looks forward to her mine action partners for the continued funding support required for maintaining the logistical and technical support to the national mine action programme amounting US dollar 2.6 million per annum.

In that light, a comprehensive extension request was submitted to the President of the 9MSP and we await a favourable approval of the request.

Madame President, with the necessary support made available, Uganda is sure to be free of landmines by August 2012. A Mine Action Programme Document for the period 2010-2012 has been prepared for resource mobilisation and implementation.

I thank you Madame President.