

A paper submitted by representative of

The State of Eritrea

On the Occasion of the

*Second Review Conference of the State Parties to the
Convention on the prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling
Production and Transfer of Anti- Personal Mines and
On Their Destructions.*

Cartagena Summit on a mine free world

(A shared commitment)

Cartagena, Colombia

30 November – 4 December 2009

Mr. President

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen:

First I would like to start by commending the Government of Colombia for hosting this very essential and remarkable event and I also thank Mr. Chairman for allowing me this opportunity to update the impacts of Mines and UXOs in my country and the progress of National Mine Action programs.

Mine and UXO problems and the
Progress of Mine Action Programs in Eritrea

1. History of Mine Impact and the Government's Response

The armed conflicts waged over the last several decades in the territory of Eritrea have left a massive legacy of landmine/unexploded ordnance (UXO), making Eritrea one of the countries in the world hardest hit by this scourge. As a result, Eritrean people have been and remain exposed to immense and severe suffering caused by landmines and UXOs.

The response of the Eritrean Government to the impact of landmines and UXOs was planned and strategic. Immediately after Eritrea's liberation in 1991 as well as right after the conclusion of the 1998-2000 border conflict with Ethiopia, army engineers carried out massive landmine/UXO clearance in the affected areas. Soon after the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia in December 2000, preparations for humanitarian action went underway and became operational in 2001. The Government established a legal framework for mine action under proclamation 123/2002 which mandated the Eritrean Demining Authority to deal with all Aspects of Mine Action.

In August 2001, Eritrea became a party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction (hereafter the Convention) and is actively engaged in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention.

2. Survey and Objectives of Mine Action Programs

The Eritrean Mine Action Program (EMAP) with the cooperation of its partners undertook a National Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) between March 2002 and June 2004. The LIS indicated that out of Eritrea's 4,176 communities, 481 are affected by landmines. This represents 914 Suspected Hazard Areas covering approximately 130 square kilometer area, impacting 655,000 people.

The LIS identified over 5,000 mines and UXO victims including 295 new victims within the 24 month of the interview by LIS. The information provided by the LIS is limited to only communities with reported landmine presence. Such information is detailed in the National Survey of people with disabilities prepared by the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare.

The population groups hardest hit by landmines and UXOs are rural inhabitants, nomadic people, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees. The problem is nationwide, with areas in the northern part of the country equally affected as those places that were battlegrounds in the most recent war.

Key humanitarian challenges at the moment include making land safe for resettlement of returnees and expellees in Debub and Gas Barka Regions; freeing land for agricultural use to ensure food security; building social support systems for the most vulnerable population groups; and creating linkages with recovery, reconstruction and development of the social and economic infrastructure.

Based on the findings and information submitted in the LIS reports, the Eritrean Demining Authority in collaboration with its program partners prepared the first phase of national strategic plan covering the 2005-2009 period. The strategic plan has a vision of:

"An Eritrea with physical environment that will permit free movement, uninhibited development and poverty reduction initiatives, where victims are assisted and integrated into society, and no new victims are occurring due to mines and UXOs."

Within the context of such a vision, the mine action objectives were drafted with the following priorities:

- Return of internally displaced persons and refugees,

- Clearance and Marking in communities identified as high and medium impacted by the LIS,
- Implementation of an effective Mine Risk Education that reduces risk and casualties,
- Improvement of Victim Support System based on existing services which are followed up by the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare (MoLHW),
- Adherence or Integration of Mine Action Planning to the National Development and Humanitarian Priorities Strategy,

3. Review of the Operations

With the start of humanitarian demining programs in 2001, a number of international demining organizations were active in Eritrea. However, their operations were ineffective. Despite of the huge amount of funds that they had at their disposal, the results they achieved was minimal. Moreover, the activities of these organizations were not in compliance with the national development policy and strategy.

This necessitated the restructuring of Mine Action in the country. The restructuring was achieved with the establishment of the Eritrean Demining Authority. Consequently, most of the NGOs which were working in Mine Action left the country in mid-2002. Since this development, significant assistance for the Eritrean National demining Program has not been forthcoming.

Currently, EDA and UNDP have an ongoing capacity building program while UNICEF assists EDA in Mine Risk Education. In this occasion, we would like to thank the two UN Agencies and the source donors for their valuable assistance.

Despite the very minimal external assistance, the Government of Eritrea is using its meager resources to tackle the impact of mines and UXOs and expedite the mine clearing programs. At the moment, the salary of all operational teams and sustainable logistical provisions are provided by the Government. Currently, the available manpower capacity of the nation is as follows:

- 16 to 18 standardized 60 person Demining Teams conducting mine, UXO and explosive remnants of war (ERW) clearances, deployed in the impacted regions according to priorities and also detecting/checking roads for safety from new landmines planted by the enemy,
- 2 Survey, 2 Quality Assurance and 2 EOD operational sections,
- 10 standardized MRE teams and about 100 community volunteers monitored by EDA deployed in all regions of the country to raise the awareness of the public about the dangers of mines, UXOs and ERW, and
- 57 community volunteers monitored by the Red Cross Society of Eritrea (RCSE).

4. Mine Action Progress 2001 to October 2009

4.1. Stockpile Destruction

As indicated in the annual article 7 reports, Eritrea does not possess any stockpiled mines. Eritrea does not produce nor purchase or transfer any mines. All mines that were stockpiled were laid in minefields during the border conflict with Ethiopia. Only a small number of Anti-Personnel Mines (APMs) are currently held for training purposes at the Eritrean Demining Authority Training Centre.

All the mines that Eritrea had possessed were recovered from Ethiopian minefields or storage facilities. Mines which Eritrean military engineers recovered both during the struggle for independence and during the border conflict with Ethiopia were laid in minefields. None remained in stockpile after the end of the border conflict. The mines and UXOs encountered in the minefields are destroyed immediately in situ or are moved to safe and suitable location for destruction at the end of the operational day.

4.2. Mine Clearance Update

Anti-personnel mines cleared	10,195
Anti-tank mines cleared	965
UXOs cleared	67,839
Total area cleared	54,131,071 meter square

Besides this, the teams have been conducting battle area clearance and a daily checkup on suspected roads from newly laid mines, so as to ensure the safety of public transportation.

The EDA has been regularly providing annual statistics on Mine Risk Education in Eritrea including information on Casualties, MRE and Victim Assistance.

4.3. Mine Risk Education (MRE)

The EDA with its partners has developed tools to empower the youth and school children about Mine Risk Education.

- 1,066,339 people received Mine Risk Education.
- 468 elementary school teachers from all regions of the country received training to give MRE to their students.
- 35 journalists from the Ministry of Information received training to broadcast MRE on radio.
- 240 sub-regional, village, and surrounding administrators as well as members of line ministries in the six regions of the country were sensitized in MRE through workshops held in each region.
- April 4, the day declared by the UN General Assembly as the 'International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action' is annually celebrated in Eritrea starting the year 2006. This occasion have been used to make the public aware and sensitize it about the impact of landmines and UXOs.

4.4. Victim Assistance

- The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare is responsible for supporting landmine and UXO survivors.
- The Ministry provides assistance to mine victims through its Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs encompassing physical and socio-economic rehabilitation which are managed by members of the respective community.
- The MoLHW has expanded CBR to the majority of mine affected communities in the country, and has increased its services to meet the requirements of the integrated approach to mine action.
- Emergency care for victims of mine accident is given top priority in Eritrea. The Ministry of Health has provided emergency first aid training for health care and community workers in mine affected areas. The trainees are responding effectively to landmine and other traumatic injuries.
- The majority of landmine survivors have had access to orthopedic workshops.
- Persons with disabilities including landmine survivors who have reached the age of 18 are entitled to their share of farmland. Able bodied persons are given farmland at the age of 30, and only if they are married. This is a significant advantage for persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities have legal protection against discrimination and are provided with acceptable level of care and access to services. The Government of Eritrea is working on raising public awareness on the needs of persons with disabilities. In a bid to provide equal opportunities in all spheres of the society for persons with disabilities, the national policy guarantees persons with disabilities' access to a variety of services and assistance in all programs.

Some of the elements of the Government of Eritrea's plan concerning assistance for persons with disabilities including mine victims are:

- Reduce death and complication by providing emergency care training for high and medium mine affected communities.
- Continue the ongoing training of surgeons in saving limbs, flab closure and other aspects of amputation.
- Develop infrastructure, train manpower and provide emergency equipment and supplies in health centers located in or near highly mine affected communities.
- Provide landmine survivors with mobility aids that are designed to meet their particular needs and environment.
- Prepare a draft national legislation in line with the Convention on Persons with Disabilities.
- Ensure that new buildings throughout the country are made accessible to persons with disabilities.

5. Achieved objectives

- Thanks to the successful humanitarian demining operations, all internally displaced persons have returned to their original places.
- Landmine/UXO clearance of most of the highly impacted areas in the Gash Barka and Debub Regions has ensured the safe movement of the communities.
- The sustained MRE resulted in the reduction of mine and UXO victims, except for those deliberately targeted by the enemy.

6. Remaining Task and Impending Circumstances

Based on the data recorded by the LIS, it is apparent that much remains to be done to totally free Eritrea from the impact of mines, UXOs and ERW scattered all over the country. The LIS that was carried out in 2004 identified 130 square kms of mine impacted area. And since the LIS reports to date only 21 square kms area has been cleared. Therefore, more than 109 square kms area remains to be cleared.

As indicated in previous statements, the external assistance acquired since the start of the program and currently available is insignificant compared to the remaining task of mine action in the Eritrea.

The Eritrean Government is carrying out its mine action programs using the available national capacity and resources by incorporating it to its national development plan. Unless significant outside support is acquired, it will take much longer to complete the national mine clearing program than was planned initially.

For all the above mentioned reasons, the State of Eritrea ^{will need to request at a future} ~~requests the~~ Meeting of States Parties for a 10 years' extension of the deadline to accomplish and ensure complete clearance and destruction of all landmines and UXOs in the country, according to Article 5 Paragraph 3 of the Convention.

I thank you

Amended version of the
final page of the Eritrean stmt.