

AFRICAN UNION

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PRESS RELEASE

The African Union commemorates the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

Addis Ababa, 9 April 2015: In its continued efforts to promote awareness of the dangers posed by anti-personnel landmines and Explosive Remnants of War, the Commission of the African Union (AU), in collaboration with the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), hosted, today, at the AU Headquarters, a commemorative event marking the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. The theme for this year is **'More than Mines'**. The objective is to look beyond the effects of anti-personnel mines and to take into account the threats posed by unexploded bombs, unsecured weapons and ammunition and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

The ceremony was attended by representatives of member states and international partners and featured statements by representatives of the UN, the ICRC, the European Union (EU) and the AU. It provided an opportunity to express support for the objective of a landmine-free Africa and to take stock of the progress made on the continent towards the full implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction. 52 out of 54 members of the AU are party to the Convention. Emphasis was also placed on the responsibility of States in protecting their citizens and addressing the needs of mine victims, including by adhering to international humanitarian law treaties aimed at protecting civilians from the effects of landmines, cluster munitions and explosive remnants of war.

During the ceremony, tribute was paid to the brave men and women involved in demining, as well as to the UN, the ICRC and other international partners for their support to mine action in Africa. The event concluded with a photo exhibition about landmines, explosive remnants of war and the people affected by them, and a choreographic dance performance by Jackson People with Disabilities Modern and Traditional Dance and Circus Group.

NOTE TO THE EDITORS

About the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action: On 8 December 2005, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared that 4 April of each year shall be observed as the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. It called for continued efforts by States, with the assistance of the UN and relevant organizations, to foster the establishment and development of national mine action capacities in countries where mines and explosive remnants of war constitute a serious threat to the safety, health and lives of the civilian population, or an impediment to social and economic development at the national and local levels.

OAU/AU's initiatives: Since 1995, the OAU/AU has launched a number of initiatives aimed at addressing the scourge of anti-personnel landmines and other explosive remnants of war. These initiatives include the Kempton Park Plan of Action adopted by the First Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines, held from 19 to 21 May 1997, in Kempton Park, South Africa. This was followed by the African Common Position adopted in preparation to the First Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention which took place in late 2004.

In April 2014, the Commission launched the Mine Action and Explosive Remnants of War Strategic Framework Project Document for the period 2014 to 2017. The objective of the Strategic Framework is to support AU Member States in reducing the threat posed by mines, explosive remnants of war, cluster munitions and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), in accordance with the relevant international instruments and best practices. The Strategic Framework promotes the concept of national ownership, recognizing that while substantial regional and international support and assistance is required, national Governments hold the primary responsibility for developing and implementing mine action and explosive hazard management programs.

Why commemorating the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action? Anti-personnel landmines and unexploded remnants of war have continued to pose a serious threat to health and safety of civilians in Africa during hostilities and in post-conflict settings. Significant agricultural land is abandoned, causing destruction of livelihoods and food insecurity. Landmines cutoff trade routes and undermine economic and social integration among peoples and nations. They also prevent the repatriation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees, whose land was contaminated during hostilities. Moreover, landmines hamper the delivery of humanitarian aid and hinder lifesaving health services, including immunization campaigns against debilitating diseases. In addition, landmines, unexploded remnants of war and IEDs pose a serious threat to the AU and UN, peace support and peacekeeping operations.

2015-04-09

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