

Briefing on Continental and Regional activities in the area of Mine Action in Africa

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Tomorrow (16 September), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1032nd session on activities in the area of mine action in the continent.

It is envisaged that following the opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Chad to the AU, Mahamat Ali Hassan, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, will make a statement. It is also expected that the representative of the United Nations Mine Actions Services (UNMAS) will make a presentation. Others expected to make statements include the Chairpersons of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) and the representative of the European Union (EU).

Council emphasized at its 837th session on International Disarmament that antipersonnel mines, explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continue to impose serious risk to the lives, safety and health of civilian populations. As highlighted in the Statement of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) to the AU at the commemoration of 2021's International Day for Mine Awareness, there were 30,000 deaths caused due to the use of explosive weapons recorded in 2019 only, out of which 66% were civilian deaths. In addition to the immediate risk to the life and safety of individuals, mines and ERW also impede social and economic development and stand as serious hindrance to humanitarian action. On the impact for humanitarian work,

United Nations (UN) General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 74/80 of December 2019 (A/RES/74/80) stated that the presence of mines and ERW in humanitarian settings impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance, thereby impacting the lives and livelihoods of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other members of civilian populations who are dependent on humanitarian aid.

Africa hosts majority of the world's countries that are highly affected by mines and ERW. While encouraging steps have been taken by multiple African States in ratifying and taking some steps towards implementation of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) and other relevant instruments, there is still much that remains to be done. Notably, the number of AU States parties to the APMBC suspected to be contaminated with or affected by anti-personnel mines and ERW has decreased from 30 to 16 States. However, the remaining 16 States are yet to fully meet their obligations related to demining. For instance, according to data presented by the Mine Action Review of 2020, out of eight States parties to the APMBC with regards to which no clearance of anti-personnel mines was recorded for the year 2019, seven were African countries. The same review also indicates that of the nine States parties to the APMBC, which failed to submit their reports on its implementation for the year 2020, seven are African States. In addition, in countries like Mali that confront struggles against armed non-State actors, increased threat from improvised anti-personnel mines has been recorded. This has invoked reasonable concerns over re-proliferation of mines in conflict affected African countries. One of the issues for PSC during tomorrow's session is how to address these gaps and ensure that States renew their commitments towards full implementation of the APMBC.

Another relevant instrument is the Declaration of States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines

and on their Destruction (Maputo Declaration). The Maputo Declaration has been instrumental in highlighting the need to expedite demining efforts around the world, thereby setting the year 2025 as a deadline by which member States shall ensure that there are no new mine victims in areas under their jurisdiction or control and that survivors are fully assisted and included in societies on equal basis with others. As the deadline for the implementation of the Maputo Declaration quickly approaches, it is essential for member States of the AU through the leadership of the PSC to reflect on how far they have been able to meet their commitments and how they can strengthen efforts towards meeting the 2025 deadline. Indeed, silencing anti-personnel mines and freeing African countries from landmines should form part of the AU flagship project on Silencing the Guns.

In addition to demining efforts, it is also important to emphasise the importance of taking actions against the production, export and proliferation of landmines and other excessively dangerous weapons. Particularly in light of the rise in illicit proliferation of arms in Africa, it is important for member States to remain cautious and take additional institutional and legal measures against the infiltration of excessively hazardous weapons into their territories. Although some IEDs that are remotely operated are not considered as mines, it is equally as important for States to take all necessary measures to ban the use of these devices and restrict the availability of the chemicals and elements, which are used to locally manufacture them. States also need to abide by their obligations under the APMBC to destroy their mine stockpiles, which impose serious risks including the possibility of diversion and use by unauthorized non-state actors. As experience in some African States, exemplified most recently by the experience of Libya, has indicated in the past, the lack of strict and proper regulation of the flow of arms and importantly their proper stockpiling and management has enabled non-state groups and separatists to obtain mines

in black markets at very low prices, in some cases, serving as catalyst for outbreak of conflicts.

Another issue of interest for tomorrow's session related to the proliferation of mines is the issue of porous borders. In addition to taking measures against production, transfer and storing of mines within their territories, States need to strengthen border security cooperation among them in order to thwart attempts by criminal and terrorist groups to traffic mines and other arms and weapons. In order to protect civilian populations and spare them from the impacts of mines and ERW, States also need to engage in awareness creation campaigns and consider incorporating lessons in their education curriculum, targeting particularly rural communities and refugees and IDPs who are at heightened exposure and risk of mines and ERW.

One of the major constraints that has lagged AU States parties to the APMBC from implementing their commitment under Article 5 to conduct mine clearance activities is the lack of sufficient resources and the decline in donor funding for mine action programmes. This has become particularly more challenging in the context of Covid-19 outbreak, which has forced concerned States to divert most of their resources towards efforts aimed at responding to the pandemic. The AU Mine Action Strategic Framework launched by the AU Commission is aimed at, among others, supporting concerned member States transition to national ownership and financing of their demining efforts. One of the avenues the AU Commission aims to explore in this regard is through providing capacity building trainings for AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs) on management and clearance of explosive hazards. It is important to explore similar approaches and options in order to address the resource barrier faced by concerned member States.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a press statement. Council may emphasise the serious victimisation of civilians as a result of mines and other dangerous weapons and call on States and other relevant actors to take necessary

measures against production, use and transfer of such weapons. The PSC may decide that the monitoring and promotion of the efforts of member states in the clearance of mines and the banning of the production, circulation and use of mines in Africa should be included in the AU Roadmap on Practical Steps for Silencing the Guns in Africa as silencing mines on the ground that threaten the lives and personal security of people is as important as silencing other forms of arms. It may encourage Member States, who haven't yet done so, to sign, ratify and implement the APMBC as well as the Maputo Declaration. It may urge States who are already parties to the APMBC to take all necessary measures to clear mined areas, assist victims of landmines and ensure timely reporting on their clearance and demining activities in line with Article 7 of the Convention. Member States may also be urged to sign, ratify and implement the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), in order to ensure that survivors of exploded mines are fully assisted. Council may also appeal to international partners to continue their support for States in their mine clearance activities as well as efforts aimed at strengthening border control and weapons regulations. In light of the importance of enhancing cross-border coordination and cooperation to control transfer of mines as well as their use in border areas, Council may call on Member States, who have not yet done so, to accede to and ratify the AU Convention on Cross-Border Cooperation (Niamey Convention). The various RECs/RMs may also be requested to enhance their regional strategies on management of cross-border threats. The AU Commission may be requested to mobilise support, including technical and financial resources, in collaboration with its partners.