

# Briefing on Mine Action

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Today (1 April), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1072<sup>nd</sup> session to receive a briefing on mine action in Africa. The session will be held in person. This will be the first in person PSC session since the Council made a decision in March 2020 to hold all its meetings virtually due to COVID19 restrictions on physical meetings.

It is envisaged that following the opening remarks of the PSC Chairperson of the month and Permanent Representative of Burundi to the AU, Willy Nyamitwe, the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, will make a statement. It is also expected that the representatives of the United Nations Office to the AU (UNOAU), the European Union (EU) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will deliver their statements.

The session is taking place at the margins of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action which is observed on 4 April. The session is expected to shed light on the impact of anti-personnel landmines and underscore the importance of upholding various regional and international normative frameworks towards enhancing mine action and for member states to achieve complete clearance from anti-personnel mines. While the majority of Africa countries are state party to the Anti-Personnel Mine Action Convention, according to the concept note circulated for the session '16 AU member states are suspected to be contaminated and/or affected directly by anti-personnel mines.' And 12 AU member states are yet to identify and destroy anti-personnel mines. This also illustrates the gap in norm implementation and the importance of bridging this gap through concerted and

collective action as well as global partnership.

To further promote and advance the Convention various instruments have been adopted including 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). Maputo Declaration has been instrumental in mobilizing commitments among member states on the implementation of time-bound obligation of the destruction of all stockpiled anti-personnel mines by the year 2025. In addition, in line with the five-year Oslo Action Plan adopted in 2019 state parties to the convention committed to design national responses that accommodate the diverse needs and experiences of people in affected communities. Hence, tomorrow's session presents an opportunity to reflect around the challenges, prospects and risks in relation to compliance and implementation, particularly as the deadline provided in the Maputo declaration is fast approaching.

Indeed, to support member states in meeting the set deadline, the 1032<sup>nd</sup> PSC session held on 16 September 2021 has requested the AUC to convene an experience sharing and lesson learning session in mine action. It would be of interest to PSC members to request an update around the session. Such forum will also be important to design long term plans for countries affected armed conflict and those in post-conflict situations as well. Anti-personnel land mines have long term effects and continue to kill and injure people even after cessation of hostilities by warring parties. It is thus imperative for countries to develop comprehensive plans for the various stages of conflict situations.

In the same session the PSC had expressed concern over threats related to anti-personnel land mines particularly in relation to the effects of COVID19 on mine action. It has further requested the AUC to integrate mine action into the AU Master

Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2030 and to finalize the Draft AU Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) Mitigation Strategy and submit for Council's consideration. In this context the AUC may provide update on these processes.

Similarly, it is to be recalled that the 837th PSC session recognizing the risks associated with IED and their devastating impact on civilians, called on 'Member States to prevent and counter the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) through integrated and coherent approaches including helping one another, and demand the Commission to continue consultations with Member States to develop the necessary framework in this regard'.

In this regard, the session may highlight the use of IEDs and their serious impact on civilian population. More particularly with the increased level of urbanization coupled with the rise of conflicts in cities, various types of explosive weapons are being used by belligerent parties. The UN Secretary General Report of August 2021 highlighted the complexities around the increased urbanization of conflicts and the catastrophic impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The casualties in these settings are particularly high given population density. According to the report when explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 88% of those killed and injured were civilians, compared with 16% when used in other areas. This is a concerning trend that presenters may highlight given the nature and dynamics of current conflicts.

Another area that is expected to be underscored at the session is the importance of strengthened effort in mine action in humanitarian settings. Explosive ordnance continues to spark complex humanitarian emergencies and high rate of displacement. Population fleeing violence and armed conflict have also been confronted with further danger and risks associated with explosive weapons. Anti-personnel mines have also been a major hindrance for the delivery of life saving

assistance and humanitarian action. In this respect ICRC's intervention is expected to highlight the humanitarian aspect and the effects of weapon contamination on civilian population in armed conflict.

The expected outcome is a communique. The PSC may express concern over the continuing threat of anti-personnel mine and the devastating effects of its use despite the strides made by member states. It may call on member states, in close collaboration and coordination with the AU and Regional Economic Communities/Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs) to enhance and revitalize national response to realize the goal set in Maputo Declaration as well as the Oslo Action Plan. The PSC may urge countries that are yet to remove anti-personnel mines in their territories to do so rapidly and to ensure timely reporting on the clearance and demining activities. It may call on for strengthened international partnership to support the complete clearance of AU member states from anti-personnel mine. The PSC may reiterate its previous call for the AUC to convene an exchange forum around mine action and to expedite the finalization of the Draft AU Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) Mitigation Strategy.