

International Day on Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action

International Day on Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action Date | 3 April 2023

Tomorrow (03 April), the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) is expected to convene its 1146th session in commemoration of international day on mine awareness and assistance in mine action, with a specific focus on impacts on peace and security in Africa.

Following opening remarks by Abdelhamid Elgharbi, Permanent Representative of Tunisia and Chairperson of the PSC for the month of April, AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS), Bankole Adeoye, is expected to make a statement. Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/RMs), the United Nations (UN) Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) may also deliver statements at the session.

The last time the PSC convened a session under the theme 'mine action in Africa' was on 01 April 2022, which constituted its 1072nd meeting. The session served to emphasise the importance of developing inclusive approaches in Africa to raise awareness around the risks and dangers of landmines. Having regard to the significance of coordination and collaboration to achieve the aim of eliminating landmines from the continent, the PSC at that session underscored the need to establish a continental mechanism for mine action to coordinate member states' efforts and requested the AU Commission to finalise the AU Mine Action and Counter-Improvised Explosive Device (IED) Strategies and submit to the

PSC for its consideration. Tomorrow's meeting presents the opportunity to follow up on the implementation of these and other previous decisions of the PSC.

Although mine action efforts have demonstrated some success over the years in some parts of the continent, there has been alarming increase in the use of landmines and explosive devices in multiple African countries in recent years. In the Central African Republic (CAR) for instance, the threat of explosive devices has shown a worrying rise since 2021. According to data recorded by the UN, the years 2021 and 2022 have demonstrated a significant increase in the use of explosive devices in CAR as compared to 2020. UN's report indicates that in 2021, 44 incidents involving explosive devices were recorded, resulting in 30 deaths and 48 injuries while in 2022, 54 incidents were recorded which killed 12 people and injured 46. The most recent data recorded as of 10 March 2023 indicates 20 incidents involving explosive devices, which have claimed the lives of 9 people. In April 2022, anti-personnel mines were also discovered in CAR for the first time. Having regard to 2020 when the UN recorded only two incidents of usage of explosive devices in CAR which resulted in no casualties, the figures recorded over the recent years are cause for serious alarm. They indicate increased exposure of civilian population to areas affected by landmines and even ongoing use of landmines in recent years. It would therefore be of interest for PSC members to call for the establishment of the factors behind these worrying trends in the use of landmines in CAR in order to take targeted measures to contain and eventually end this scourge.

Mali is another country that has been experiencing increasing threat of landmines, mainly IEDs. According to the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), significant increase has been noted in the use of IEDs in Mali since 2017 which was initially concentrated in the central parts of the country but gradually continued to expand to other parts, particularly to the

country's western regions. In January 2023, representing one of the more recent incidents of IED explosions in the country, 16 people were killed and 25 were injured in explosions concentrated mainly in the Mopti and Ségou regions. The [2022 Landmine Monitor Report](#) further indicates the use of antivehicle mines in Mali during the 2021-2022 reporting period. Reports from earlier years have also alluded the use of antipersonnel mines in Mali, mainly by non-state armed groups.

One of the most concerning spikes in the use of IEDs is perhaps the one currently being witnessed in Somalia. As part of its change in tactics of insurgency, Al-Shabaab has increased its focus on expanding the use of various forms of IEDs, including vehicle-borne IEDs and remotely detonated ground IEDs. In the period from January to March 2023, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) data shows a 120% increase in the use of IEDs and remote explosives by Al-Shabaab in parts of Somalia, as compared to the previous reporting period of October to December 2022. In the first two weeks of March 2023 alone, remote explosions perpetrated by Al-Shabaab reportedly constituted nearly 60% of the total events of violence recorded in Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle regions.

The use of IEDs in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, has been indicative of a more worrying trend – the possible existence of an active regional network enabling the use of external assistance in building capacity for manufacturing IEDs at insurgent bases in the region. Reports have demonstrated that IS sponsored training and financial support in late 2020 could have a direct link with the introduction of IEDs in Cabo Delgado in 2021, the same year the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) considerably increased its use of IEDs in eastern DRC and border territories of Uganda, suggesting the existence of a wider regional network connecting ADF and insurgents operating in northern Mozambique that, among others,

facilitates the spread of the explosive devices into Mozambique.

Further to the security risk it imposes, the increasing use of IEDs in these countries is also a serious impediment to the provision of timely and effective humanitarian assistance to populations affected by conflict and crisis. For example, in CAR, not only are the main victims of explosive devices civilians – with nearly three quarters of the victims reported in 2022 and 2023 being civilians – but also the presence of explosives in various parts of the country has been a major deterrent limiting humanitarian access to civilian populations. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), over 900,000 people targeted for humanitarian assistance in 2023 are at risk of delayed or suspended aid as a result of access constraints emanating from suspected presence of explosive devices in the concerned areas.

The trends observed in these and other conflict settings in Africa signal the increasing utilisation of mines as well as growing sophistication in the means and methods of warfare particularly in terms of use of IEDs deployed by non-state armed groups and terrorist organisations. They also signify the ease with which these actors access the required resources and expertise in the manufacturing of mines, particularly IEDs. There is hence need to devote increased attention to identifying and addressing the underlying factors facilitating access to resources used in the development of explosive devices in concerned member states. Among others, this will require proper regulation of national weapons' stockpiles to avert smuggling of state-owned explosives and materials that can be used in making new explosive devices. It further calls for the strengthening of inter-state collaboration and coordination to halt cross border trafficking of explosives and to prevent exchange of technical expertise as well as financial assistance in their development.

While drawing attention to the increasing spread of IED usage in the continent is pertinent, it also remains critical to emphasise the continuing significance of ensuring full clearance of antipersonnel landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) through destruction of national stockpiles in line with the 1997 Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty, particularly in the context of states in post-conflict phase. According to the 2022 Landmine Monitor Report, five of the seven states parties to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty that are known or believed to have mine contamination in their territories but have not provided information or recognised their clearance obligations under the treaty, are African countries. A significant number of African member states are also falling behind on their obligations to ensure full landmine clearance by 2025 in line with the 2014 Maputo Action Plan. This signals to the need to strengthen mine action efforts in the continent including through enhanced mobilisation of funds for mine clearance activities at the national, regional and continental level.

The expected outcome of tomorrow's session is a Communiqué. The PSC may express grave concern over the increasing spread of IEDs in Africa and their wide usage among non-state armed actors and terrorist groups. It may call for the AU Commission to work with relevant RECs and UN entities to examine the factors behind this worrying trend and to develop strategies specific to each affected country for addressing this scourge. The PSC may also call for the inclusion and expansion of counter IEDs capabilities in the AU Transition Mission in Somalia and to the support that the AU Mission to Mali and Sahel provides to Mali as well as the mobilization of capabilities for detecting and clearing landmines to the CAR and other countries specifically affected by landmines. It may also call on member states to ensure secure storage of state-owned explosives and enhanced regulation of stockpiles, including complete destruction of antipersonnel landmines. It may further underscore the importance of fortified

coordination between member states in combating the cross-border transfer of explosives and in the removal of landmines from border areas. It may note the grave humanitarian cost of explosive devices, including curtailing humanitarian access to populations in need and in that respect, call on all relevant stakeholders to explore alternative approaches including air-based provision of humanitarian assistance while deploying mine action capacities to clear areas affected by mines impeding humanitarian access. The PSC may also call on states parties to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty to fulfil their obligations under Article 5 relating to the destruction of antipersonnel mines and urge those member states that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty. It may further emphasise the importance of enhancing mine action funding to enable member states meet their clearance obligations outlined under Article 5 of the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty as well as the Maputo Action Plan.