Ethiopian Mine Action Office: Tackling Landmine Problems in Ethiopia

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*Ethiopian Mine Action Office*

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Ethiopian Mine Action Office: Tackling Landmine Problems in Ethiopia

Ethiopia’s landmine/unexploded ordnance problem is largely due to past wars and conflicts. The Ethiopian Mine Action Office was created in an attempt to alleviate the situation. This article discusses the country’s efforts and the mistakes made to make it safe.

by Zewdu Derebe (Ethiopian Mine Action Office)

Ethiopia has suffered from a landmine/unexploded ordnance problem for more than seven decades due to the following factors and other wars and disputes:

- Italian invasion in 1935
- The Ethiopia and Somalia conflict, 1977-1978
- The dispute with Sudan in 1980
- The Ethiopian Civil War, 1975-1991
- The recent conflict with Eritrea, 1998-2000

Though the Ethiopian Landmine Impact Survey results need further verification, the preliminary findings of the survey indicated that 2,443 square kilometers (943 square miles) of land contain mines. Over 10 million people in Ethiopia live in landmine-impacted communities, and the survey identified 1,492 responsible areas impacted by landmines and UXO. Three regions in particular are contaminated: Tigray, Afar and Somali.

To address this problem, EMAO was established by the Ethiopian government through the Council of Ministers Resolution No. 70/2001, under the Office of the Prime Minister. EMAO’s role is to address the government’s focal point for management of mine-action operations and related activities to allocate special funds to build local and national mine-action capacities.

Conclusion

With the highest level of political commitment, establishment of the NMAA and heavy involvement of the United Nations and the international donor community, the progress of mine-action developments in Sudan seem very positive. Of the 1,000 suspected mined areas identified so far, 270 have already been cleared by the implementing partners of the United Nations and national and international organizations.

A number of key supply and access routes to land used for agriculture and third to any land used for grazing. As a result of EMAG’s humanitarian-demining operations, which began in May 2002, more than 20.8 million square meters (about 8 square miles) of land infested with mines has already been cleared. About 1,291 anti-personnel mines, 209 anti-tank mines and 20,410 pieces of UXO have been found and destroyed, with an immense number of fragments collected and eliminated.

In the coming years, EMAO plans to increase its output considerably. This, of course, can be accomplished through proper utilization of its experience and by employing additional mine-removal specialists including machines.

In light of these facts, and if the ELIS data is more or less considered to fall around 2,443 square kilometers (943 square miles), then the impacted communities and mined-infected lands would take a number of years to tackle. Therefore, the EMAO would like to employ further assistance prevention methods including using demining Bell machines and taking various technical measures, and to tackle the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict. The Ottawa Convention, which Ethiopia ratified in the fall of 2004, obliges the country to remove and destroy its emplaced anti-personnel mines within 10 years.

At present, there are a number of demining companies, the mechanical demining machines and the dog teams are deployed on the boundaries of the three affected regions of Ethiopia. These prioritized areas are all found in the country’s three heavy mine-afflicted regions. Each company is comprised of 3-18 members (one Technical Survey and mine clearance platoons). Additionally, each company is assigned a Quality-assurance Officer. Licence work permits are issued for each operation that is planned.

References

Derebe: Ethiopian Mine Action Office: Tackling Landmine Problems in Ethiopia

See Endnotes, page 110