The Republic of Sudan is one of Africa’s most heavily landmine- and explosive remnants of war-affected countries. The true extent of the problem in Sudan largely remains unknown as a country-wide Impact Survey has just recently been initiated to measure both the scope and impact of the situation. However, current assessments indicate that Africa’s longest civil war has left 21 of the 26 states of Sudan affected by landmine- and ERW-contamination that threatens the daily life of civilians, impedes the country’s economic recovery and development. The Government of National Unity of Sudan officially launched the country’s National Mine Action Authority at Friendship Hall, in Khartoum, Sudan. The new NMAA gathers the other mine-action entities in the country under its umbrella and represents Sudan’s commitment to confronting and eventually eliminating its landmine and explosive remnants of war problem.


Establishing the NMAA

With technical and advisory support from UNDP-Sudan, the National Mine Action Authority was established by Presidential Decree No. 299, dated 24 Dec. 2005, in accordance with Article 58 (1) of the Interim Comprehensive Peace Agreement (the Comprehensive Peace Agreement). The NMAA is composed of four domestic entities:

1. National Mine Action Committee
2. General Secretariat of the NMAC
3. National Mine Action Center (based in Khartoum)
4. Regional Mine Action Center in southern Sudan (based in Juba)

The NMAC is co-chaired by the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Minister of National Defense, with the State Minister of Humanitarian Affairs designated as the Secretary-General of the NMAC. The NMAC is composed of representatives from 13 ministries of the Government of National Unity (GOSSU), two representatives from the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS), and one representative from the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).

The establishment of the NMAC addresses one of the key requirements of the Mine Ban Convention in terms of implementation measures. The NMAC will serve as the national policy and regulatory body for mine action in the country. In addition, it will deal with all matters related to the obligations of Sudan under the Mine Ban Convention, which includes mine-action legislation, development of national mine-action implementing structures, identification and clearance of mined areas, destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines, and assistance to landmine/nerve-gas ordnance victims. Finally, the NMAC will ensure allocation of funds for mine action in the national budget.

The Official Launching Ceremony

Opening session. About 250 representatives from various government, humanitarian, and international organizations, and civil society organizations attended the NMAA’s official launching ceremony. Several national and deputy ministers of the GOSSU, representatives of the GOS and senior officials from the United Nations including UNMAS, the UNDP, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Mission in Sudan also participated. Additionally, the opening session was attended and addressed by:

- President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Omar Hassan Ahmad El-Bashir
- His Excellency Mr. Kenti Manou, Minister of Humanitarian Affairs
- Lt. General Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein, Minister of Defense
- His Excellency Mr. Ahmad Mohamed Haroun, Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs (and Secretary General of NMAC)
- Dr. Mitchel Mouskins, Representative for the Deputy Special Representative to the Secretary General/ Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident UN Coordinator of the U.N. System in Sudan, 1

All the speakers welcomed the establishment of the NMAC and described it as a milestone in the establishment of a national mine-action legislative and institutional framework and national leadership.

In his opening address, Haroun highlighted the importance of the NMAC, underscoring the role of the NMAC. On behalf of the GOSSU, the GOS and the NMAC, he extended his gratitude and appreciation to the U.N. and its system for supporting the fight against landmine- and ERW-contamination.

In addition, the importance and urgency of the development of the national mine-action framework and national mine-action capacities was identified as a few key challenges in addressing landmine and ERW-contamination in Sudan. The event was attended by representatives of the National Mine Action Authority, the GoS, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and the various donor agencies. The NMAC also took the opportunity to address some of the challenges facing the new organization.

The NMAC is an independent body that will provide policy and strategic guidance to the national mine-action implementing structures and will serve as the national focal body for addressing the mine-action goals and objectives of the country. El-Bashir asked the institutions within the governments of GOSSU and GOS, as well as the United Nations, the donor community and all concerned, to unify and increase their efforts in addressing the challenges of post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction. He expressed hope that this body will provide a national platform for the coordination and consolidation of all mine-action-related issues and activities in Sudan and serve in the best interests of landmine- and ERW-affected communities, landmine survivors and the larger Sudanese population.

El-Bashir also said that the GOSSU has included mine action in its national budget for 2006 and will allocate funds for mine action in the coming years. Realizing the long-term nature of Sudan’s landmine- and ERW-contamination problem, El-Bashir urged that GOSSU continue mine action into all reconstruction, recovery, and development plans and projects. He highlighted that, given the magnitude of the landmine/ERW contamination, Sudan would need financial and technical support as well as the cooperation of the donor community, the United Nations, and national and international institutions for many years to come.

Working session. During this session, representatives of the National Mine Action Center and key U.N. mine-action agencies (UNMAS, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR) gave presentations highlighting the magnitude of the landmine and ERW-contamination problem in Sudan, achievements to date, ongoing activities/projects, the limitations, challenges, and future plans. In particular, presentations highlighted the following: Of the 350 suspected mined areas identified so far, 240 have been cleared, 3,221 (2,000 miles) of roads have been verified as safe, 617 kilometers (383 miles) of roads have been cleared, and more than 571,000 Sudanese people have received education on mine-risk education, survey and clearance of mine-affected areas, assistance to landmine survivors, and the destruction of stockpiled AP mines. The NMAC will serve as the national focal body for achieving the mine-action goals and objectives of the country. El-Bashir asked the institutions within the governments of GOSSU and GOS, as well as the United Nations, the donor community and all concerned, to unify and increase their efforts in addressing the challenges of post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction. He expressed hope that this body will provide a national platform for the coordination and consolidation of all mine-action-related issues and activities in Sudan and serve in the best interests of landmine- and ERW-affected communities, landmine survivors and the larger Sudanese population.

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in the country. The Commissioner General of Humanitarian Aid Commission also presented highlights of the government’s vision and plans for addressing the landmine- and ERW-contamination problems in the country and priority areas for assistance.

The presentations were followed by an hour of open discussion and comments among various ministries, national and international organizations, U.N. agencies and individuals. The main discussion points included the following:

• All the parties appreciated and welcomed the establishment of the NMAA and stressed that addressing the landmine/ERW problem in Sudan must be taken as a “one country approach,” with unified national planning, coordination and implementation across Sudan.

• Sudanese ownership and leadership are critical to solving Sudan’s landmine/ERW contamination problem in the long term through the development of a pool of qualified, trained and experienced national staff.

• The building of local and national capacities should be given priority in the projects implemented by the United Nations and international organizations.

• The NMAA will review, revise, validate and implement preliminary memoranda of understanding/agreements, policy frameworks and strategic frameworks related to mine action in Sudan.

• The NMAA will hold broad-based, inclusive and transparent consultation processes and discussions with all concerned national bodies, the United Nations, donor communities, national and international and civil-society organizations and interested individuals.

President of the Republic of Sudan and President of the GOSS.

Mayardit thanked the United Nations, the donor community and all other organizations and institutions that have assisted and supported the Sudanese authorities and people in addressing the landmine/ERW-contamination problem in Sudan. He welcomed the establishment of the NMAA as a milestone in addressing the landmine/ERW problem in the country and requested all concerned national bodies, the United Nations, the donor community and all national and international operators to work closely with the NMAA in addressing the landmine- and ERW-contamination problem in Sudan. Mayardit stated that in addition to the efforts of the GOSS, the GOSS will take all necessary measures in support of the NMAA to establish an effective national-coordination mechanism by providing a national platform to all mine-action actors and stakeholders in the country.

Mayardit further stated that the Republic of Sudan and its people will ultimately have to address the landmine/ERW-contamination problem in the long term. Therefore, he made a strong appeal to all the U.N. agencies, the donor community and all other national and international bodies to work closely with the concerned national authorities within the framework of the NMAA. This support will contribute to building national management and operational capacities, thereby enhancing national ownership and leadership. In addition, he appealed to the donor community 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 prospects of mine-action developments in Sudan seem very positive. Of the 1,000 suspected mined areas identified so far, 270 were suspected as containing unexploded ordnance and other mines and unexploded ordnance is suspected in the central and southern parts of the country have already been verified to be safe or cleared. With these positive developments taking place, the problem of landmine/ERW contamination in Sudan may be contained very soon and Sudan will be able to meet its obligations under the Mine Ban Convention.

The NMAA will further assist Sudan with continued mine-action program.

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by Zewdu Derebe [Ethiopian Mine Action Office]

Ethiopia has suffered from a landmine/unclear ordnance problem for more than seven decades due to the following factors: landmines and/or the war and disputes:

• Ethiopian invasion in 1935
• The Egypt-Sudan 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 indicate that there are more than 2,443 square kilometres (943 square miles) of land contaminated. Over 19 million people in Ethiopia live in landmine-impacted communities, and the survey identified 1,492 communities as impacted by landmines and UXO. Three regions in particular are contaminated: Tigrai, Afar and Somali.

To address this problem, EMAO was established by the Ethiopian government through the Ethiopian Council of Ministers Regulation No. 70/2001, under the Office of the Prime Minister. EMAO acts as the government’s focal point for management of mine-action operations and related activities in the country.

EMAO is provided with the necessary financial and human resources to conduct mine-risk education and community-mobilization programs.

EMAO’s mine-awareness program was established in March 2002 and is provided by many village-level task forces. Community-mobilization Officers are found in Giboteka, Ahsleem, Talby, Afars, Mordhibe, Kefa, Hamous (Tigray) and Ehlalax (Afar).

EMAO plans to acquire all mechanical demining machines and expand the mine-detection dog program to be deployed in the mine-clearance activities, which will be integrated with existing integrated mine-clearance forces.

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Zewdu Derebe heads the Director’s Assistance Office for the Ethiopian Mine Action Office.