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Ethiopian Mine Action Office: Tackling Landmine Problems in Ethiopia

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

• The 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 kilometres (943 square miles) of land contain mines. Over 10 million people in Ethiopia live in landmine-impacted communities, and the survey identified 1,492 responsibilities 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 instrument of the 1991 Prime Minister’s resolution. EMAO has a mandate to reduce the threat to the population caused by landmines and UXO. Its work is integrated with its existing humanitarian demining operations, which began in May 2002, more than 20.2 million square metres (about 8 square miles) of land infested with mines has been already 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 human and technological equipment.

The Ethiopian Mine Action Office: Tackling Landmine Problems in Ethiopia

Zewdu Derebe heads the Director’s Assistance Office for the Ethiopian Mine Action Office (EMAO) for four years. He has attended the UNDP Senior Manager’s Course presented by the Mine Action Information Center, as well as many other mine-action-related workshops in different countries. He holds Bachelor of Science from Addis Ababa University.

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