COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR MINE AWARENESS AND ASSISTANCE IN MINE ACTION

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OPENING REMARKS BY
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Excellencies, ambassadors and representatives of AU Member States and members of the Mine Action Support Group, Distinguished representatives of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for responding favorably to our invitation and joining us at this commemorative event. The International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action is an important opportunity to celebrate our collective achievements, reflect on the challenges, and renew our commitment to work steadily towards overcoming them.

Landmines, explosive remnants of war, and other explosive threats, pose a serious threat to human life, health and socio-economic development. Their impact far exceed the duration of conflict, and generations that have not lived the war find themselves having to bear the cost of its consequences, often paying the ultimate price.

Twenty-one years have passed since the adoption of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in 1997. African nations were without a doubt strong advocates in the global process leading to its adoption. We proudly look back at the strong positions adopted in this regard by the AU Summits as early as 1995.

Over the past years, remarkable progress has been achieved. As of today, 95% of the AU Member States are party to the Mine ban Convention.
the 29 States that have declared stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines have since destroyed them. At the time of accession to the Convention, 25 States declared areas under their jurisdiction in which anti-personnel mines were known or suspected to be emplaced. As at the end of 2017, 13 of these States have declared that clearance of contaminated areas have been completed, thereby ensuring that anti-personnel landmines will no longer cause death or disability among their populations, nor undermine socio-economic development.

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate each and every State for this tremendous achievement. I must also underscore that such achievements would not have been possible without and the generous support provided by international partners to national mine action programs and humanitarian demining agencies.

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

As we celebrate this progress, we must realize that the job is far from complete. 12 African States that are party to the Mine Ban Convention continue to struggle with the deadly legacy of landmines. Insecurity, lack of national resources, and dwindling international support, are unfortunately slowing down mine clearance efforts and prolonging the adverse impact of landmines on communities and development efforts. The victims, already among the most vulnerable populations, continue to live in poverty and agony, having little or no access to trauma care, physical rehabilitation services, or socio-economic reintegration support.
Moreover, factory-made antipersonnel mines are not the only threat that the continent is contending with. Non-state armed groups are increasingly deploying sophisticated improvised mines, also commonly referred to as victim-activated Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Terrorist groups in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin have deployed such explosives in the most reprehensible manner, targeting civilians, humanitarian actors and peacekeepers. These groups are unrestrained by regard for human life nor international norms.

Improvised explosive devices now constitute a daunting challenges to peace-support and peace-keeping operations across the continent, and are causing significant deaths and injuries among troops. Often times, these troops do not have the required operational capacities and human expertise for explosive ordnance disposal.

Additionally, and as conflicts continue on the continent with varying degrees of intensity, they will invariably leave behind a range of explosive remnants of war, including unexploded and abandoned ordnances. These explosive hazards restrict humanitarian action, prevent the return of refugees and IDPs, and hinder post-conflict reconstruction efforts long after the fighting subsides.

Because of this wide range of legacy and emerging explosive hazards, mine action has become an integral part of the peace and security architecture, contributing to humanitarian action, peacebuilding and sustainable development.
This is why this year, the Mine Action Day is commemorated globally under the theme “Advancing Protection, Peace and Development”.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

In 1999, Maputo hosted the first meeting of States Parties to the Mine-Ban Convention, marking the beginning of the international community’s efforts to end an era of anti-personnel mines. In 2014, States Parties returned to Maputo, and with the same sense of committed, adopted a declaration in which they pledged to ensure that there are no new mine victims in areas under their jurisdiction or control, to see that survivors participate in their societies on an equal basis to others, and to intensify their efforts to complete their obligations by the year 2025. The African Union strongly endorses this bold and ambitious declaration, and recognizes its responsibility towards supporting its realization on the continent.

I am pleased to note that in recent years, the African Union Commission has launched several initiatives aimed at delivering concrete technical and material support to Member States in this respect. These include the Mine Action and Explosive Remnants of War Strategic Framework, the inter-African platform for Mine Action Cooperation, and the Ammunition Safety Management Initiative. We will learn more about these initiatives during the course of this event and about the AU’s catalytic role in multi-stakeholder engagement, partnership building and resource mobilization. The contribution that the AU is making in mine action is well recognized and was acknowledged in the first stand-alone

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to conclude by issuing an urgent call to the concerned AU Member States to renew their commitment to mine clearance and victims’ assistance. The 2025 Maputo Commitment cannot be realized without dedicating the required resources and assuming full ownership of national mine action programs. We must also intensify efforts to address the emerging explosive threats which manifest in improvised explosives and unstable ammunition stockpiles.

I also strongly urge international partners to remain engaged and welcome their precious support. On its part, the African Union will spare no effort in serving the mine action agenda by supporting coordination, cooperation and resource mobilization efforts.

Thank you for your kind attention.