CONCEPT NOTE

WEAPONS CONTAMINATION: ADDRESSING KEY CHALLENGES TO MEETING CLEARANCE DEADLINES UNDER THE MINE BAN CONVENTION AND CONVENTION ON CLUSTER MUNITIONS

5-7 MARCH 2013, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

Background
The African Union continues to assist Member States towards meeting their mine clearance deadlines in accordance with the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. As of 10 December 2012, there are 160 States Parties to the treaty, 51 of which are African Union Member States. This treaty is the cornerstone of the international effort to end the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel (AP) mines.

The Treaty stipulates that that each States Party is expected to have cleared all of its mined areas within ten years after ratifying it. However, a number of countries have not been able to meet these requirements, and have had to reschedule their deadlines by making extension requests.

On the other hand, some AU member states are also party to the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM). This is an international treaty that prohibits the use, transfer and stockpile of cluster bombs, a type of explosive weapon which scatters submunitions ("bomblets") over an area. As of 10 December 2012, 77 countries have ratified it, 20 of which are AU member States.

The African Union, in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are organising a regional workshop on "Weapons contamination - Addressing key challenges to meeting clearance deadlines under the Mine Ban Convention and Convention on Cluster Munitions", bringing together affected AU members, to discuss key challenges in meeting clearance deadlines.

The workshop will be held at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa from 5-7 March 2013, and will involve staff from the AU Commission, technical personnel from Mine Action Centres, demining operators, experts from the ICRC weapons contamination and arms units, as well as external experts, to discuss key challenges to meeting clearance deadlines under the Mine Ban Convention (MBC) or Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and seek solutions to those challenges.
Rationale for the workshop
Whereas OAU/AU, together with Partners, have enabled AU Member States to meet and share experiences in meeting their obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty, actual assistance and cooperation in areas including destruction of stockpiles, mine clearance, and victim assistance remains a challenge. The meeting will enable documenting the challenges faced, and nature of assistance required by countries, and therefore assist in coordinating mobilization of the required resources.

The Commission is now focused on providing direct assistance to Member States. This workshop is an opportunity to exchange views with Member States on key challenges to meeting clearance deadlines under the Mine Ban Convention (MBC) or Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) and seek solutions to those challenges. The inclusion of AU members not yet party to the MBC or CCM could also enable the broader sharing of experiences and assist in the universalization efforts for these Conventions. It is, therefore, proposed that these two countries that are not States Parties to the treat: Egypt and Libya be invited to participate at the workshop.

It is further proposed that representatives from demining centers in Africa are invited to the workshop. These include Centre de Perfectionnement aux Actions post conflictuelles de Démìnage et Dépollution (CPADD) based in the Republic of Benin, and the Ethiopian Integrated De-mining Training Center. These centers offer training in areas including mine risk education, mine clearance, and stockpile destruction. The participation of officials from these demining centers is expected to enrich the discussions with practical aspects and proposals for strengthening the assistance to the affected countries.

Proposed agenda
The workshop would focus on challenges faced in meeting clearance deadlines, and how to overcome such challenges.

I. Identifying the extent of the weapons contamination problem
II. Securing national political & financial support
III. Developing and maintaining a clearance plan
IV. Competing priorities – e.g. which problem or region to tackle first?
V. Technical challenges
VI. Resource limitations – human, financial, technical
VII. Legal & administrative issues

Timeline
It is proposed that this three day workshop for the Member States most affected by landmines, be held 5-7 March 2013 in Addis Ababa. It is envisaged that there will be for eighty (80) participants. The Commission is requested to provide a venue for this meeting as well interpretation services for the four AU official languages.

Expected deliverables
The main deliverable of the workshop will be a report detailing the challenges faced by Member States, the nature of support required, and the way forward for providing concrete support to AU Member States party to the MBT in meeting their obligations under the Treaty. From the follow up of
this workshop report, the Commission hopes to strengthen inter-alia African cooperation and to stand behind Member States as they harness their efforts to ban the production and use of these anti-personnel mines, destroy stockpiles and provide mine risk awareness education and assistance to victims of landmines.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will fund expenses related to the meeting, including the expenses for travel arrangements, accommodation, DSA, consultants’ fees, etc.