

INTERSESSIONAL WORK PROGRAMME OF THE STANDING, COMMITTEE  
28 JANUARY - 1 FEBRUARY, 2002  
STATEMENT BY THE ERITREAN DELEGATION

Distinguished Co-Chairs  
Distinguished Delegates  
Ladies & Gentlemen

On 27 August 2001 Eritrea signed the 1997 convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction. It is thus an honor and a pleasure for my delegation to address this standing committee as a full-fledged State Party for the first time.

After 3 decades of protracted war and 2 1/2 years of border conflict, Eritrea has a significant Landmine and unexploded ordnance problems. Some of the Landmines could even be tracked back to the 2nd world war as the British and Italians were engaged in war in Eritrea.

However, the main contamination, is all along the 1000 Km. border between Ethiopia and Eritrea due to the recent armed conflict.

On our side, we have given all the mine field records of the recent war. We are waiting for Ethiopia to reciprocate our action and good will as a State Party. The unavailability of information on Landmines has created enormous problems to our program and the U.N. Peace Keeping Mission.

Despite the dissemination on mine awareness, we witness many victims from among the internally displaced people. Just last Friday before I left Eritrea I learned that 8 children were blown off by Landmines. Four of them died instantly and four were seriously injured. This is due to the lack of Landmines information from the other side.

My Government has prepared draft Mine Action legislation and is ready to implement it. It is taking the necessary measures to develop the managerial part of Eritrean Mine Action Program (EMAP) so that it can be able to accomplish the necessary tasks.

Moreover, my Government has shown its commitment to the mine action programs. The function of this newly set up body is to formulate overall policies and to approve national mine action plans, by involving all concerned ministries.

This body will have an executive level which will prepare drafts and submit national mine action plans to the policy level for approval. Following approval, the EMAP implements these plans on a priority basis.

So far, the operational level is being performed by military and civilian operators. NGOs are as well engaged at the operational level.

The Eritrean Government has accepted and has begun to implement the recommendations of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) regarding the handling of the Mine Action Program. As a sign of its commitment Eritrea has established an internationally recognized mine action program which will perform the action of mine marking, mine awareness and risk reduction. To date it has involved 450 manual deminers from the Eritrean demining agency (EDA) which is a national NGO and another 450 deminers from International mine action agencies.

Eritrea being a new nation and one of the least developed countries, cannot do the job on its own. Therefore the involvement of the international community to compliment the strong Eritrean commitment in fulfilling its obligation for the implementation of the Convention is highly appreciated. Its continuation in this direction will greatly contribute to the success of the program.

Eritrea has the practical experience of what land mines can cause to the safety, well being and development of a society. So when Eritrea acceded to the Ottawa Convention on the Ban of Landmines, it is based on the deep understanding and principled commitment of the use of such Convention. At this juncture we would like to remind this Standing Committee that signing and ratifying a convention alone is not enough. There should be a commitment to respect and abide by it.

Eritrea has been involved in wars that were all imposed upon it. Eritrea has never used landmines for attacking or destructive purposes but as a defense strategy. With this renewed commitment we declare to be bound by this convention.

The Government is committed and is ready to stand by the principle of mine free world. We assure you that we are ready to abide and do whatever is possible from our side because we know and are still living under the scourge of landmines.

We would like to thank governments and international organizations who have rendered assistance to Eritrea in its mine action program and we put our humble request to continue to do so.

I thank you