

Eritrea's Concise Statement for the 11th meeting of States parties

H.E. President **Prak Sokhonn** president of the 11th meeting of States Parties

H.E. Mr. **Gazmend Tiurdu** Ex-president for the 10th MSP

Excellencies

Delegates of States and organizations Representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me first to extend my appreciation to the Kingdom of Cambodia for the excellent preparations they have done to host this meeting and at the same time congratulate H.E...

for his election as the president for this conference and wish his success in leading this conference as well as the smart and commendable performance witnessed in the leadership accomplished by H.E. Mr. **Gazmend Tirdiu** president of the 10th MSP.

Excellencies and Honorable colleagues,

To save your time, I have tried to make a concise statement out of the full text of the extension request submitted to the president and have put the points in the following order.

1. Origins of the Article 5 implementation challenge

Eritrea has been the setting for so many major armed conflicts in the last century. The conflicts waged over the last several decades have left a massive legacy of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of war (ERW) making Eritrea one of the countries in the world hardest hit by this scourge.

The struggle for independence that lasted 30 years since 1961 until 1991 and culminated in Eritrea's formal independence in 1993 resulted in considerable landmines and UXO contamination and the laying of numerous non-conventional hazardous ordnances in vast areas of the country, near military camps, roads, battle zones, strongholds of cities and populated areas, farmland and water resources. Again in 1998 a border conflict resulting in a two-year war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia causing the laying of defensive minefields by both armies along the 1,000 km long common border.

2. Efforts made to tackle the Impact of landmines and ERW

In response to the impact of landmines and ERW, the Eritrean government from the very beginning after liberation in 1991, gave the greatest attention and focus for the destruction and clearance of landmines. Military field engineers were deployed to the whole impacted areas of the country and diligently conducted a massive task to clear or at least alleviate the impact of landmines and protect the civilian population.

In 1995 the initial humanitarian activity started in Eritrea with an agreement made between Eritrea and the United States and with an indigenous organization called Eritrean Humanitarian Demining Program (EHDP) which started to operate in Eritrea until the border conflict in 1998. The border conflict war escalated the landmine and other ERW contamination escalated to its worst level inflicting great losses and harm on the socio economic and psychological aspects of civilian life.

In August 2001, Eritrea became a party to the Convention and became actively engaged in fulfilling its obligations. It was necessary to establish a National Mine Action Authority to have the primary responsibility of coordinating and managing Mine action and developing policies, standards, procedures and guidelines. Therefore, the Eritrean government through proclamation 123/2002 established the Eritrean Demining Authority in 2002 with the task of clearing landmine and returning areas to productive use, educating Eritrean civilians of the dangers of mines and on ways to identify and report them, facilitating the repatriation of internally displaced persons and refugees and integrating mine action into the national development plans.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

The establishment of the EDA led to the restructuring of Mine Action in Eritrea. The consequences of the changes caused a chain of events that led to phasing out the contract of most international organizations and left the country. This was followed by the suspension of the Mine Action Capacity Building Program, which was executed by the UNDP, in October 2005. Despite this fact, the EDA with limited Mine Action Capacity Building Program support of the UNDP resumed the Humanitarian Demining Program in 2007.

In line with the establishment of the EDA, The first nationwide effort to identify the landmine and UXO contamination was through a Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) which began in March 2002 and concluded in June 2004 resulting in the identification of 914 Suspected Hazard Areas (SHAs) measuring 129 sq.kms. Out of these 914 SHAs, 752 SHAs affecting 411 communities were identified as contaminated by AP mines, a mix of AP mines and AT mines or a mix of AP mines, AT mines and UXO. These are 203 areas in Anseba, 112 in Debub, 12 in Debubawi Keih Bahri, 107 in Gash Barka, 72 in Maakel and 246 in Semienawi Keih Bahri regions.

Prior to the accomplishment of the LIS, incomplete gathered data from different sources were kept by the UNMEE MACC. Several organizations contributed in conducting general surveys in specific areas mainly in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). 516 records were identified by different sources and served as a baseline for demining operations. However, since areas surveyed prior to the LIS overlapped with the country wide LIS findings, at this moment the Eritrean Demining Authority (EDA) employs the LIS findings as the baseline for the planned task.

During the period of 2001 – 2010 a total areas measuring 54,755,011 square meters, have been cleared. 30,852,678 square meters of this was cleared after the LIS, culminating in the destruction of 10,296 anti-personnel mines, 998 anti-tank mines and 69,401 UXO. All of this progress has been made in communities identified by the LIS as being affected by mines.

The Eritrean Demining Authority through its Operations and QA/QC departments carries out the responsibility of all aspects of quality assurance and quality control standards according to the Eritrean Mine Action standard (SOP). All individuals deployed or involved in the humanitarian mine clearing task are trained to be responsible for quality assurance.

3. Impeding Circumstances

Based on the data recorded by different surveys, it is apparent that much remains to be done for Eritrea to fulfill its obligations under Article 5. At the present time, the EDA does not have the necessary information to produce a detailed plan for completion of its Article 5 obligations but seeks to proceed to carry out additional surveys to precisely define the remaining challenge.

There are a number of circumstances why Eritrea has not been able to fulfill its obligations under article 5 obligations; but to mention some of the main impediments: One is **(1) Amount of contamination**. The contamination problem in Eritrea covers a large surface area and extends throughout the country. The number of conflicts has left a great number of landmines and UXO.

(2) Shortage of Resources: Resources of assistance acquired since the start of the program and currently available is insignificant compared to the remaining task of mine action. Therefore in addition to the governments committed efforts, external support is required to conduct technical survey and to expand the number mine clearance teams..

4. Work plan and Budget for the Remaining Challenge

Given the above statement, Eritrea is requesting a **Three years extension Until February 2015** in order to conduct non-technical and technical survey to identify the exact remaining challenges for fulfillment of Article 5 obligations.

Eritrea is drafting a national strategic plan 2011 to 2015 with main objectives to be:

- (a) 50% area reduction by conducting effective technical and non technical surveys until 2014.
- (b) Clearance of the remaining High and Medium mine impacted areas until 2015.
- (c) Continue clearance of land mines and UXO for the low impacted areas.
- (d) Continue to conduct national MRE activities to sensitize communities to reduce new casualties until full clearance is assured.

During the extension period, Eritrea will conduct level two surveys in the LIS recorded impacted areas according to the priority assessments. According to current priorities, the demining teams are going to be deployed in the impacted regions of Anseba, sub regions **Halhal, Keren, Haboro, Geleb, Hagaz** and **Kerkebet** and Northern Red Sea Region, sub region **Karora, Mahmimet, Afabet** and **Shieb**.

Resurvey which is currently our crucial task has started and is continuing to be conducted in the following regions.

Anseba region, sub regions **Hagaz, Keren, Halhal, Geleb, Elaberid, Hamelmalo, Asmat and Aditekelezan**

Semienawi Keih Bahri region, sub regions: **Karora, Afabet, Shieb, Foro and Massawa.**

Debubawi Keih Bahri region, subregions: **Maakel Debubawi Keih Bahri, Debub Debubawi Keih Bahri, Assab and Araata.**

Maakel Region, Sub regions **Serejeka, Gala Nefhi and Berik**

The capacity proposed in the coming 5 year plan is as follows:

Existing two teams will increase to five teams adding one team each year will expand to eight teams by the end of 2014.

The existing two EOD teams will increase to three teams by the end of 2011.

The existing two Survey teams will increase to three teams by the end of 2011.

The existing two Q/A teams will remain unchanged.

The existing Ten MRE teams will remain unchanged.

50 people will be added each year to rank of community volunteers to reach 300 by the end of 2014.

In order to fulfill the goals of the extension request, the total budget being prepared for the strategic plan (2011-2015) is **8.5 million USD**. Out of this the government is committed to cover the monthly salary payment for all field teams estimated around **5 million USD**.

Mr. president, excellencies, honorable colleagues,

Finally I would like to note that on page 24 number 14 of the detailed context in the extension request indicated by N.B. on the third line, I apologize for the writing error and kindly request you to correct the word Semienawi by Debubawi to be read as Debubawi Keih Bahri (meaning Southern Red sea Region).

I Thank you.