



EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN

Ms Ester Ikere Eluzai, Undersecretary Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Ms Mary Kojo Ali, Director General, Social Protection, Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, Ms Roda Atianasy, Chairperson, South Sudan Network of Women with Disability, Mr John Malith, South Sudan Action Network on Small Arms, member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Hon. Jurkuch Barach Jurkuch, Chairperson National Mine Action Authority, distinguished Ambassadors and Heads of Mission representatives, UN, Media representatives, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the European Union, I am delighted to be at South Sudan National Victim Assistance and Disability Stakeholders' Dialogue under the theme: *Meeting the Needs of Mine Victims.*

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. With all its Member States being parties to the Convention, the European Union (EU) is strongly united in banning the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines. The Convention is an example of what the EU stands for: a rules-based international order, rooted in the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law.

As a State Party to the Convention, South Sudan is one of 30 that have declared having a responsibility to assist mine victims under its jurisdiction. The Convention's Committee on Victim Assistance met with the head of the National Mine action Authority of South Sudan in 2018 in Geneva. South Sudanese authorities requested the Committee to support South Sudan in its victim assistance efforts to which the Committee agreed to and recommended South Sudan as a beneficiary of the EU-backed enhanced support.

Today, we are gathered here to kick-start the development of South Sudan's first inclusive National Victim Assistance and Disability Action Plan. The plan will provide a guide to South Sudan in how to fulfill the promise to mine survivors under the Convention, while doing so with parallel development efforts and always from a rights-based approach. The plan will facilitate implementation of victim assistance obligations under the Convention and related action plan, the National Disability and Inclusion Policy. This process is fully sponsored by the EU and some follow up efforts will also be supported.

Not only that, the EU is also sponsoring a global conference on assistance to victims of mines and other explosive remnants of war and disability rights in Amman, Jordan in September. The South Sudanese Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the National Mine Action Authority have been invited and sponsored to participate to further engage with disability, labour, and health practitioners and other international peers on the best way forward for their disability plan.

From the liberation struggle and the outbreak of the armed conflict in South Sudan in December 2013, battle areas have been potentially contaminated with the detritus of war. In many places where fighting has occurred, unexploded items remain a hazard to civilians and humanitarian aid agencies.

These anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war have affected the lives and livelihoods of the people of South Sudan for a long time. These mines continue to cause dreadful harm, instil fear and stop refugees and internally displaced people from returning to their homes. Mines also continue to strip the country of a fair chance of economic recovery and development, and survivors are often condemned to a life of poverty because of their injuries and the lack of rehabilitation services.

In 2018, 56 persons were injured or killed in ten different states; unfortunately, more people continue to fall victims to mines or other explosive remnants of war. There are at least 5.1% South Sudanese living with disabilities with 21% of these impairments caused by war/conflict-related incidents.

Access to services including rehabilitation, employment and education and large disparities with persons without disabilities is among the most prominent challenges facing persons with disabilities in the country. The European Union therefore reaffirms its strong commitment to support actions addressing the threats of anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, including improvised explosive devices.

The European Union Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) has previously provided financing and support through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in South Sudan which has been aimed at reducing the danger of these mines and other explosives, increase arable farming land and also pave access for humanitarian workers to do their job.

To reduce the pain and dangers of the anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war, we need to work together. The government and opposition forces must maintain the ceasefire, including the planting of such mines and we must collaborate to address the challenges that have come with the effects of the war including managing and providing for mine victims in South Sudan.

Thank You!