

## INTRODUCTION

### **Mr El Ghassim Wane, Organisation of African Unity**

Long after the end of hostilities when heavy armaments have been decommissioned, contained or destroyed and media attention has moved elsewhere, civilians in former conflict zones continue to run the gauntlet of a deadly, often invisible enemy: the anti-personnel mine (APM). Unlike a human enemy during conflict, the APM does not know when a cease-fire has been called, it cannot distinguish between parties to the conflict, between armed soldier and unarmed civilian, nor between men, women or children.

World-wide, it is estimated that more than 110 million of these deadly traps are in the ground and awaiting their victims. These victims may be civilians carrying out daily tasks, such as collecting firewood or water and cultivating their land, or children simply playing near their homes. Many people displaced during wars are unable to return to their land and to participate in the reconstruction of their war-torn society due to the presence of mines. Health services, already crippled by years of conflict, will be further burdened by extensive treatment for landmine survivors. Agriculture is disrupted where land is mined or those who tend the land have been disabled. Furthermore, industry and commerce are affected when strategic infrastructural sites have been mined and roads are not safe to travel due to the presence of mines. Thus, economic and social development is severely hindered, while dependency on external assistance is increased.

This situation is exacerbated by the high cost of clearing APMs. While the mines can cost as little as between US \$3 and \$30 to produce, the cost of clearing each can be between US \$300 and \$1 000. The demining process is time consuming and dangerous: for every 5 000 mines cleared, one deminer is killed, two are injured and, somewhere in the world, a further 100 000 mines are laid.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics are, at best, approximations. However, the actual human tragedy and suffering caused by each mine remain the same. A victim of a landmine in a rural area may wait in agony for hours before being discovered and rescued (at great danger to those who rescue him/her if the area contains mines). Then there follows a potentially long and uncomfortable ride in whatever means of transport is available to a local medical centre. If effective surgery under anaesthetic is available, the survivor is fortunate, even more so if (s)he can be fitted with a prosthesis. The family will no doubt be concerned about the cost of repeated surgery and of a prosthesis, which should be replaced every few years (or even more often in the case of children). Many families are forced into debt to cover these costs, a situation that is worsened by the fact that the victim is temporarily or permanently unable to continue her/his former employment and duties. In fact, the survivor has become a burden on her/his family and community and may even be rejected. Further rejection may be encountered by society at large: for example, the survivor can encounter prejudice when wishing to enter into a personal relationship or

marriage. The explosion that lasted a few milliseconds has caused a lifetime of adversity and struggle.

The scourge of APMs is most acute on the world's poorest continent. Eighteen of Africa's fifty three states are plagued by these inhumane weapons and six of these appear in 'The Top Twelve', a list of countries with the greatest number of APMs within their national borders.<sup>2</sup> Angola, Mozambique, Chad, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt are most seriously affected, while Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Namibia, Rwanda and Burundi have lesser, but nonetheless significant problems with APMs.

Between February and April 1995, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) organised three seminars in conjunction with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to raise awareness of the landmine problem among African states. The seminars also served to brief OAU delegates on the Vienna Conference to review the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW).

As a result of the seminars, the 62nd Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers unanimously adopted Resolution CM/Res1593 which focuses on the following:

- ratification of, or accession to the 1980 CCW and its Protocol II entitled Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices;
- support for a global ban on anti-personnel mines – African states were called upon to defend a common position on this issue throughout the 1996 CCW review process;
- developing and strengthening inter-African co-operation in the areas of mine clearance and the provision of assistance to victims; and
- appeals to the international community to increase its assistance to African countries affected by mines.

At the CCW review conferences, held between September 1995 and May 1996, revisions were made to Protocol II which deals with restrictions on the use of landmines. However, there was disappointment among some states and non-government organisations (NGOs) that the conferences fell short of reaching any kind of ban on these weapons. The desire on the part of a few states to register their support for a total ban and to encourage others to follow, led to a Canadian initiative known as the Ottawa Process.

Eleven African states attended the first meeting of the Ottawa Group in October 1996 to catalyse practical efforts to move toward a ban and to create partnerships between states, international organisations and agencies, and NGOs. These efforts were essential to build the necessary political will to achieve a global ban on APMs. In the Chairman's Agenda for

Action on Anti-Personnel Mines considerable emphasis was placed on the need to act at the regional and subregional level.

The OAU, in co-operation with the South African Government, took up this challenge by convening a conference entitled *Towards a Landmine-Free Africa: The OAU and the Legacy of Anti-Personnel Mines*, held at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park, South Africa, from 19 to 21 May 1997.

This first continental conference of African experts on landmines, which was chaired by Ambassador Abdenahmane Bensid, Permanent Observer of the OAU to the UN (Geneva), brought together approximately 200 delegates from almost 40 countries, representatives of international organisations, specialised agencies of the UN, NGOs, and a few landmine survivors. The opening plenary session was addressed by Mr Thabo Mbeki, Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu on behalf of African Campaigns to Ban Landmines and Professor Kader Asmal, Minister of Forestry and Water Affairs of the Republic of South Africa and Chairman of the National Conventional Arms Control Committee. Messages were read on behalf of Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary-General of the Organisation of African Unity and Mr Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations. Between the opening and closing plenary sessions, participants were divided into three working groups to pursue different objectives:

- Track 1 focused on steps to be taken nationally and continentally towards promoting and supporting a global ban on APMs. Attention was also paid to measures that can be taken to create landmine-free zones in Africa.
- Track 2 was concerned with enhancing African capacities in landmine clearance. Consideration was given to inter-African co-operation and the effective use of locally available expertise to provide long term solutions to the landmine problem.
- Track 3 considered ways of improving the provision of assistance to victims of landmines and strengthening African capacity in this area.

In the plenary session of the third day, the topic of *International Co-operation and Financial Mechanisms for Mine Clearance and Victim Assistance* was discussed. The conference was addressed by Mr Joe Modise, Minister of Defence of the Republic of South Africa in the closing plenary with news of the detonation of 4 700 anti-personnel landmines from South Africa's stockpile. This was the first phase of the destruction of the entire stockpile.

This report aims to reflect the presentations, the ensuing debate and the activities of the three workshop groups over the three-day period. Throughout the conference exhibitions demonstrated the work of the African Campaigns to Ban Landmines and the equipment and capabilities of various demining companies.

The conference succeeded in its aim to bring together relevant actors in the struggle against the scourge of landmines. Advice and experience was

shared, new partnerships were forged and the momentum towards a total ban was increased. The ICRC, which compiles a list of states supporting a total ban on APMs, was able to add six African states<sup>3</sup> to its list,<sup>4</sup> while written confirmation is awaited from States that made declarations of support for such a ban during the conference.<sup>5</sup> Together, the participants worked to formulate a strong Plan of Action with detailed activities and strategies in support of a comprehensive ban on landmines and increased efforts for APM clearance and victim support in a regional and subregional context. This document was endorsed by the OAU Summit Meeting held in Harare between 2 and 4 June 1997. The OAU Secretariat will now monitor its implementation.

The OAU greatly appreciates the support of the Government of South Africa for their role in hosting this conference and of the governments of Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, South Africa, and Switzerland, as well as the ICRC for their financial contributions. The OAU also wishes to acknowledge the assistance in the organisation of the conference provided by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), an independent African research institute based in South Africa. Penny McMillin and Jean Lausberg of the ISS compiled this report which was edited by Dr Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director of the ISS.

## **ENDNOTES**

- 1 Statistics from the ICRC, Mines Overview 1996.
- 2 UN Data Base, quoted in AP Mine Ban: Progress Report issued by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.
- 3 Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mauritius and Sierra Leone.
- 4 This list previously recorded the African states of Angola, Burkina Faso, the Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe as supporting a total ban on APMs.
- 5 Including Burundi, Gabon, Guinea, Liberia and Sudan.