

EDITORIAL

LANDMINES: IS THE END IN SIGHT?

Uncleared anti-personal mines do not respect a peace agreement or ceasefire. They continue to kill, months or years after a truce had been called between the warring parties. In 1997 there was an estimated 50 million landmines scattered throughout Africa, twenty million in Southern Africa alone. Estimates suggest that 250,000 people have died or been injured because of landmines in Africa in the past 35 years.

Recently the Second Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines, held on 15-17 September 2004 in Addis Ababa, took stock of how much has been achieved and, how much needs to be accomplished in the future. In this edition of the *African Security Review* Noel Stott “reflects on the importance of engaging with armed non-state actors (ANSAs) in order to truly universalise the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and to establish the non-use of anti-personnel landmines as the international standard. It outlines one of the most innovative civil society mechanisms created to do this and argues that it is the responsibility of both civil society and governments to engage with ANSAs, with the aim of facilitating global co-operation to stop all use of anti-personnel mines.”

Based on the on the results of the Second Conference, there seems to be progress being made in dealing with APM challenge. A concern expressed, though, was that landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) affected many countries in Africa and include: Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic

of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia (including Somaliland), Sudan, Swaziland, Syria, Tunisia, Uganda, Western Sahara, Zambia and Zimbabwe and that landmine casualties continue to be reported in most of them.

Although progress is being made, it does not seem to be moving fast enough. The question is: what catalyst is needed to fast track the clearing of the mines? Financial assistance and dedicated management of the mine clearance process could be the answer, as most affected countries have weak economies and high poverty levels, and therefore cannot afford the cost of mine clearing. Financial assistance should not only end with the clearing of mines but should also assist victims that are maimed by landmines.

A substantial amount of land is rendered unusable and unsafe for occupation by communities due to the prevalence of APM's, and similarly land contaminated by APM's cannot be used for agricultural purposes.

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) – which includes APM – have been, and continue to be, easily accessible and available throughout Africa. This has assisted in fuelling the continued conflicts and wars that rage across the continent, within and between states, increasing the number of displaced people, as well as resulting in gross human rights abuses. Alhaji MS Bah's article on “Micro-disarmament in West Africa”, explores this

issue. Of the approximately 500 million illicit weapons in circulation worldwide, it is estimated that 100 million of those are in sub-Saharan Africa, with eight to ten million concentrated in the West African sub-region alone. The article looks into the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the West African sub-region and efforts by the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to deal with the problem through the ECOWAS Declaration of a Moratorium on the Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa. The degree of compliance with the Moratorium by four ECOWAS member states, namely, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Mali, is also explored.

Closer to home, a positive side to the landmines discussion is that South Africa no longer produces landmines. This country used to export anti-personnel mines, but it is now emerging as a leader in the field of mine clearance equipment and believes that it possesses leading de-mining technology and expertise as well as medical capability and experience to assist mine victims. Destruction of its stockpile of mines was completed by October 1998.

South Africa's positive action ties in well with the contribution by Dan Henk, Associate Professor at the US Air War College, also in this edition, where he describes how the South African defence industry has transformed since the apartheid era, and also survived the political trauma of the 1990s. According to Henk, that

feat is due to a remarkable process of consultation among key stakeholders in government, industry, academia and civil society, beginning in the early 1990s, that redefined the role of the South Africa arms industry.

The article calls attention to the emerging partnership that now assures indigenous industries will maintain 'strategically essential technologies' over the long term and provide considerable economic benefit to South Africa. This reflects a process of change in which members of a society overcame significant historical and ideological obstacles to attain agreement about key issues relating to their security, as well as overcoming the resentments of the past in a deliberate series of collective choices to shape a desirable future. Almost equally important is the fact that the South Africans rehabilitated an institution originally created to protect sectarian interests to serve the needs of the larger society.

South Africa retains a number of anti-personnel mines for the training of its military personnel to deal with anti-personnel mine threats during peacekeeping operations, as well as for the development of effective de-mining equipment, as provided for under Article 3 of the Mine Ban Treaty.

The challenge of landmines goes beyond only being a threat to communities living in areas affected. It is a developmental and socio-economic issue as it places limitations on the much needed and contested resource in Africa: land.

Mpume Nyandu