
**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling,
Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel
Mines and on Their Destruction**

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Item 13 of the provisional agenda
Consideration of requests submitted under article 5

**Request for extension of the time limit set in article 5 to
complete the destruction of anti-personnel mines**

Summary

Submitted by Mauritania

1. Contamination of the north of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania by anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war resulted from the country's involvement in the Western Sahara conflict between 1976 and 1978, which saw indiscriminate minelaying and the use of a significant number of mines, generally without any maps of where mines were laid.
2. Thirty-two years after Mauritania withdrew from the Saharan conflict, anti-personnel mines and other military explosive devices continue to kill and maim, particularly among nomadic communities, and remain a real barrier to development in this mineral-rich region of Mauritania.
3. The results of an impact study using information from mine-affected communities reveal that mines pose a major obstacle to accessing the following infrastructure: housing, roads, pastures, water points, irrigated agricultural land, rain-fed fields and non-agricultural land. They also hinder tourism development and prospecting. Suspected danger zones thus have a significant impact on socio-economic development in northern communities.
4. According to the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) database of the National Programme for Humanitarian Demining for Development (PNDHD), 618 landmine accidents, with 368 fatalities, 248 survivors and 2 unspecified, have been registered. The majority of victims were surveyed before 2001, according to statements by the administration.
5. Mauritania began mine clearance operations following its withdrawal from the Western Sahara conflict in 1978. The task was entrusted to the armed forces, which established a mine-clearance body (the National Humanitarian Mine Clearance Office) to implement the Convention after ratification in 2000.
6. Between 2001 and 2006, mine clearance was carried out by the National Humanitarian Demining Office under the military engineers of the Ministry of Defence.

The Office was organized along the lines of other known bodies active in this area. It comprised a chief, an operations unit, a quality control unit, and a unit for raising awareness and assisting victims. It also included an IMSMA service, which received significant support from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The service also developed standards and permanent operational procedures for, inter alia, mine clearance and quality control. All standards conform to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

7. In 2006, the Government established the PNDHD, which became responsible for all activities relating to mine clearance, educating people about the dangers of mines, providing assistance to victims and advocacy. The Programme comes under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization and is monitored by a steering committee that brings together all ministerial departments concerned with the Convention, along with donor countries and representatives of civil society.

8. Preliminary estimates indicate that all three regions in the north, covering an area of 320,000 square kilometres, are contaminated. In 2006, with support from the Mauritanian, Canadian and Swedish Governments and the United Nations Development Programme, a landmine impact survey was undertaken and identified 60 affected communities across a total area of 76,010,000 square metres, of which only 35,725,000 square metres are suspected to contain anti-personnel mines. The survey was certified by the United Nations in 2007 and forms the initial data set.

9. There are a further 52,000,000 square metres that make up the area covered by the last mine placement reports provided by the Kingdom of Morocco. Importantly, these minefields had already been cleared prior to the Ottawa Convention, but in accordance with the military regulations. Planned clearance will therefore consist primarily of verification and will be mainly mechanized, consequently taking very little time. The total initial suspect area is therefore 87,725,000 square metres.

10. Of the 31 affected areas, a total of 20,805,260 square metres has been dealt with across 14 communities, through mine clearance, technical studies, decontamination and a policy of handover of cleared land. These activities have allowed 7,259 anti-personnel mines, 316 anti-tank mines and 6,160 projectiles of various calibres to be destroyed. An area of 64,819,740 square metres remains to be cleared.

11. Mine clearance and decontamination already carried out have facilitated: the opening of roads (the Morocco–Mauritania trans-African highway, which is an important infrastructure for trade and movement of people throughout the region); water supply (especially in Nouadhibou, the economic capital of Mauritania); the development of tourism; the free movement of nomads to reach grazing land; a significant reduction in landmine accidents; and increased prospecting.

12. Furthermore, the following rural communities are no longer living with the stress of mines that obstructed their daily activities, such as grazing and gravel extraction: Swciya 1, Bir Oum Gureini, Carriere, Berwagua 2, Berwagua 1, Dhi Billal, P225 (Sweidiyat 2), Balast, Doueir, Laaiwije, Aghoweyit, Matt Cheguague and Etouajile. In addition, no landmine accidents have been recorded in these areas. Accidents have decreased considerably across the country, with only one landmine accident in 2009.

13. There are 225,000 people, 70 per cent of them women and children, living near suspected danger zones still to be cleared. These zones are often close to nomad camps in good camel-grazing areas. Suspected danger zones affect the following economic activities: access to grazing, access to water, prospecting, opportunities for urban expansion, access to the coast for development of subsistence fishing and access to the coast for tourism.

14. Since 2001, \$8,721,000 has been spent on anti-mine activities (capacity-building, educating people about the danger of mines, and assisting victims), of which \$5,525,000 has come from national funds and \$3,196,000 from the international community.

15. Predominantly manual mine-clearance techniques, using an electric detector or excavation, are regulated by national standards that conform to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS).

16. Mauritania has been unable to achieve the objectives set by the target date of 1 January 2011 for the following reasons:

(a) Mobilization of financial resources: insufficient operational funds pose a real challenge to meeting targets;

(b) Lack of momentum in mine-clearance operations: the pace of clearance has been slow, only picking up speed in 2006. This is due to the transition of PNDHD from military to civil control, the implementation of standards and permanent operational procedures, and, most of all, the impact survey certified by the United Nations in 2007;

(c) Exclusive use of manual mine clearance: the only technique used is manual clearance, which has a very low output;

(d) Climate conditions and difficult soils: very high temperatures, dune movements and hot, sand-carrying winds are among the factors that affect mine clearance to a greater or lesser extent.

17. In order to enable Mauritania to meet its commitments under article 5, an extension of five years until 1 January 2016 will be necessary, allowing an area of 64,819,740 square metres across 18 communities to be cleared at a cost of \$16,560,000, \$12,310,000 to come from the international community.

18. This time frame has been set on the basis of past experience, existing capacity, more active involvement of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a policy of approaching non-traditional donors (the Arab Gulf States and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) and, above all, coherent land and environment policies.

19. This extension will allow for technical studies, further impact studies, mine-clearance operations, quality control and land rehabilitation using non-technical methods. All operations comply with national standards and operational procedures.

20. A major effort will be made to secure (logistical) transport equipment. Operations are prioritized by agreement with the communities affected.

21. With regard to human resources, additional mine clearers will be trained on the ground from among units of military engineers or retirees, in view of security constraints and to avoid the problem of employment for mine clearers once the clearance operations have ended.

22. In terms of advocacy for resource mobilization, particular efforts will be made to approach State party donors and new non-traditional donors for assistance in implementing this project.

23. Accordingly, the Mauritanian State will supplement any investment in this area by up to 10 per cent. Requests for assistance have already been made to the following countries and organizations: France, Germany, United States, Spain, Italy, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, the European Commission and Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. The inclusion of anti-mine activities in the national poverty reduction strategy and other advocacy documents provides a positive framework for resource mobilization.

24. As part of Mauritania's policy of involving international NGOs in order to achieve its objectives, the country invited Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) and Handicap International to give careful thought to how they could participate:

(a) From 25 to 29 May 2010, NPA sent an expert to visit the area and meet donors and others involved in anti-mine activities in Mauritania. NPA was invited to work with PNDHD in the Tiris Zemmour region containing the four remaining minefields. After a site visit, the NPA representative submitted his report to the organization's headquarters and a working meeting between NPA and PNDHD was held in June 2010, during a session of the standing committee, at which the NPA president confirmed the organization's intention of working in Mauritania. To that end, an NPA technical expert mission will visit Mauritania again during October 2010 to study in depth the feasibility of their deployment in early 2011 as planned;

(b) From 1 to 10 June 2010, a mission of three experts from Handicap International visited Mauritania and also had the opportunity to tour the area and meet those involved in anti-mine activities. In particular, the mission visited the administrative division of Dakhlet Nouadhibou, which is the proposed area in which Handicap International will work. At the end of the mission, Handicap International confirmed its intention of operating in Mauritania. A project proposal has therefore been developed, which was to have been agreed by both parties by the end of August 2010. However, the two sides are still in consultation and will hold a working meeting during the third seminar for those involved in mine clearance in Francophone countries, planned for 27 to 30 September, in order to finalize the joint project document, which focuses on mine clearance, decontamination and capacity-building for PNDHD, among other things.

25. Lastly, from a technical point of view, it must be remembered that previous mine-clearance operations have shown that contamination in suspect areas is very low, which is why we believe our plan of action to be feasible. Furthermore, our national commitment to support this plan, in collaboration with our development partners and other donors, is one component of success.
