

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

16 September 2021

English

Original: French

Nineteenth Meeting

The Hague, 15–19 November 2021

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

Consideration of requests submitted under article 5

Request for extension of the deadline for completing the destruction of anti-personnel mines in accordance with article 5 of the Convention

Executive summary

Submitted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The history of the post-independence armed conflicts that have taken place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – from 1960 to 1964, 1975 to 1977, 1996 to 1997 and 1998 to 2002 – is marked by the belligerents' use of anti-personnel mines.

Ten years after acceding to the Convention, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted an intermediate extension of 26 months to clarify the landmine contamination situation. That intermediate extension was followed by two further extensions – the first of six years and the second of 18 months – of the deadline for clearing hazardous areas in a country that has 25 provinces in addition to the capital, Kinshasa, 145 territories and more than 1,200 decentralized territorial entities in a land area of 2,345,410 km².

Since acceding to the Convention, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has undertaken in earnest to solve the problem of contamination, which has caused more than 2,936 identified casualties to date. The challenge is an enormous one because of the numerous difficulties that must be overcome. The Democratic Republic of the Congo nonetheless plans to meet its obligations under the Convention with support from the international community, particularly as the international community is now working towards eradicating the threat of anti-personnel mines.

Status of work done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Before the extension under article 5, the challenge involved 33 hazardous areas totalling 128,841.7 m², as well as the territories of Aru and Dungu in the Provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé, respectively, which, as a result of insecurity, were not surveyed during the 2014 national survey.

At the same time, national coordination under the effective oversight of the Congolese Mine Action Centre – the national authority – improved noticeably thanks to the introduction of relevant tools for programme management and capacity-building of the quality management and accreditation bodies.

In that context, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted an 18-month extension beginning on 1 January 2021. A clear schedule and plan of work were developed at that point. Since then, there has been a significant decrease in the number of mine clearance



operators in the country – only DanChurchAid and Afrique pour la lutte Antimines are still active.

The 33 hazardous areas were located in the Provinces of Ituri (4), Kasai (1), Maniema (2), North Kivu (9), North Ubangi (4), South Kivu (2), Tanganyika (4), Tshopo (6) and Tshuapa (1).

The size of only one of these 33 areas, Mukwanyama 2, in the territory of Lubutu, Maniema Province, has been reduced. Its size was underestimated at 13,770 m², but after operations it turned out that this area was 14,998 m². This area was reduced by 2,477 m²; 10,562 m² were cleared. The remaining area is 1,959 m², meaning that 33 mined areas, albeit with a new area of 117,030.7 m², are still to be cleared.

Circumstances that prevented compliance within the 18-month time limit

The reasons that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been unable to meet its obligations under the Convention within the 18 months it was given are:

- Insecurity and ongoing outbreaks of armed conflict, including the proliferation of armed groups and the emergence of the terrorist movement Forces démocratiques alliées (Allied Democratic Forces)–Madina Tawheed wal Muwahedeen, which claims to be the Central African branch of Islamic State
- The sheer size and complexity of the country: inaccessibility, vegetation, the poor state of the roads and the variable climate
- The priority given to the other humanitarian and security emergencies facing the country
- A noticeable decrease in funding
- The fall in the number of mine clearance operators
- The outbreaks of Ebola (in the Provinces of Équateur, Ituri and North Kivu) and other such diseases, as well as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has brought mine clearance operations in the country to a halt

Proposed duration and reasons for the extension

The Democratic Republic of the Congo requests an extension of 42 months, from 1 July 2022 – the date planned for the end of the previous extension – to 31 December 2025, assuming that the COVID-19 situation has improved by the beginning of the requested extension period. This request is being made for the following reasons:

- To seek out and raise the funds required for the clearance of the remaining 33 danger zones of a total of 117,030.7 m²
- To seek out the technical and financial means to allow the country to finalize the surveys in the territories of Aru and Dungu, in the Provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé, respectively, and to carry out the actual mine clearance
- To follow developments in the security situation (mine clearance in some areas is contingent on operations mounted against armed groups by the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo)
- To deal with unpredictable elements such as vegetation and weather patterns that, with the rains and floods, make it impossible to clear mines at a steady pace

From the operational standpoint, based on the history of mine clearance in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and taking into consideration the country's capacity, which is increasing as domestic mine clearance operators ramp up, and the available resources, it will take at least 24 months to complete the work, not counting deployment times and risks of delays as a result of poor road conditions.

Humanitarian, social, economic and environmental implications of the extension

The humanitarian, social, economic and environmental implications are considerable, especially in the Provinces of Ituri (territories of Aru and Djugu), Kasai (territory of Tshikapa), North Kivu (territory of Beni), North Ubangi (territories of Mobayi-Mbongo and Yakoma), Maniema (territory of Lubutu), South Kivu (territories of Fizi and Shabunda), Tshuapa (territory of Ikela), Tshopo (territory of Ubundu) and Tanganyika (territories of Moba, Kalemie and Kabalo).

The presence of mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has an adverse impact on the country's ability to feed itself and on its gross domestic product. It thus contributes to worsening poverty and destitution in the affected communities.

The mines impact study shows that a number of people are living with the daily threat of suspected or confirmed mine contamination in their immediate surroundings, resulting in obstacles to agriculture and blocked access to dwellings and roads and tracks.

Refugees and displaced persons are also affected. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, in partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, continues to deal with the issue of the return of Congolese refugees still based in Uganda, Angola, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Burundi, the Congo, the Central African Republic, Malawi and other countries. The same applies to the thorny issue of the large populations of internally displaced persons located in all parts of the country, although in particular in the east and in Kasai.

In addition, 2,936 victims of mines and explosive remnants of war have been identified throughout the country, most of whom have never received appropriate assistance. The outlook for their dependants and for the victims in inaccessible or remote areas of the country who have not yet been identified is still grim.

Plan of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet its obligations during the requested extension period

From the operational point of view, the Democratic Republic of the Congo will give priority first to conducting technical surveys and mine clearance in the remaining 33 areas contaminated by anti-personnel mines. An operational plan will be instituted as part of the process of updating the national strategic plan, which must take place before the date scheduled for the beginning of the requested extension period.

This work schedule will take into consideration the country's priorities: freeing up residential and agricultural areas, areas with roads in need of repair and areas in which refugees and persons displaced by war and natural catastrophes are camped or to which they have returned.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo intends to increase the operational capacity of organizations active in the country by accrediting new national demining organizations and building the capacity of the mine clearance personnel seconded by the Corps of Engineers to other branches of the armed forces and the Congolese National Police for humanitarian demining activities.

Under the operational plan, it is envisaged that the larger and more complicated areas will be tackled first, in accordance with the above-mentioned priorities. The plan includes monthly projections according to which the surface area to be cleared, and the funding provided, will decrease over time.

During the extension period, the Congolese Mine Action Centre intends to improve the entire coordination system by updating national standards and by strengthening quality management (quality control and assurance) and information management. Working closely with all operators, the Centre will build the capacity of its staff in all aspects, in particular the management of residual contamination and improvised explosive devices.

The involvement of women in the process will be important because they are among the main victims of these devices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Funding and technical means available to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet its obligations during the requested extension period

From the financial point of view, the country's needs for this period amount to approximately US\$ 3.9 million, of which US\$ 1,696,945.15 is needed for the clearance of 33 mined areas measuring 117,030.7 m² and US\$ 568,270 to complete surveying and mine clearance in the territories of Aru and Dungu in the Provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé.

Around US\$ 1.06 million will be required for mine risk education activities during the extension period.

The Government has earmarked some US\$ 272,271.49 from its budget to help cover the programme's operating costs, including for coordination, of US\$ 600,000.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is thus seeking approximately US\$ 3.6 million to complete the work within the period.

As for technical means, the plans call for most future mine clearance operations to be carried out by hand and require the integration of mine risk education activities, in accordance with actions 28 and 29 of the Oslo Action Plan.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo currently benefits from services provided by international and national demining operators whose manual and technical teams' technical capacity should be maintained so as to cover part of the needs mentioned above.

The manual clearance part will be strengthened by calling again on several teams from the armed forces and the Congolese National Police that have already served with international demining operators. It will be indispensable for the members of those teams to receive training and new technical tools to ensure effective and efficient management of the work to be done during the extension period.
