

THIRD CONTINENTAL CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN EXPERTS ON LANDMINES
Africa as an Anti-Personnel Mine-Free Zone – Progress and Challenges
9-11 September 2009, Pretoria, South Africa

The Chair,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The African Union is pleased to be associated with this Third Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines. You will, realize that the AU and its predecessor, the OAU, have long taken an interest in the problem of landmines. Since the 1990s, the OAU, in partnership with organizations like the ICRC, hosted a number of regional seminars to build awareness, amongst Member States, of the problems posed by the proliferation of antipersonnel landmines in Africa and to mobilize support for a regional response. These efforts culminated in the First Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines and the resultant Plan of Action that took place 19-21 May 1997 in Kempton Park, here is South Africa. The convening of this Third Meeting of African Experts on Landmines, again in South Africa, is testimony for the importance the Government of South Africa attaches to the quest for a Mine-Free Africa, for which I would like to express thank the Government of South Africa.

It should be recalled that the 62nd Ordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of June 1995 adopted resolution CM/Res. 1593 (LXII), and the 63rd Ordinary Session held in February 1996 adopted resolution CM/Res. 1628 (LX III) – both expressing the OAU's preference for a total ban on mines on the Continent, and the development of Inter-African Cooperation in the field of mine clearance and assistance to victims. Indeed resolution CM/Res. 1662 (LXIV), adopted in Yaounde in July 1996 the Council reaffirmed the African Common position aimed at the total ban of antipersonnel mines and called for the adoption of regional and national measures to ban antipersonnel

mines, and adopted, as a goal, the establishment of Africa as an Antipersonnel Mines-Free Zone.

The Kempton Park Conference discussed African Policies on anti-personnel landmines, the momentum toward a global ban on anti-personnel landmines, legal aspects of humanitarian law pertaining to landmines, and the pursuit of Africa as a landmine-free-zone. The final OAU Plan of Action that was adopted makes specific reference to the importance of demining, assistance to landmine survivors, and international cooperation and finance. Indeed the Kempton Park meeting made a major contribution to the final Ottawa Convention. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, also known as the Mine Ban Treaty (MBT), entered into force March 1, 1999. Consequently, States may no longer sign it, but rather they may become bound without signature through a one-step procedure known as accession – which is provided for in Article 16(2), and I would like to call upon those Member States that have not signed the Treaty to accede to it.

Following the Kempton Park meeting, the AU convened the Second Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines, which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 15 to 17 September 2004, to elaborate a common African Position on anti-personnel landmines. The conference noted that while much progress had been made, more still needed to be done for states to meet all their obligations in terms of the MBT and the Kempton Park Plan. But although much progress has been made, not only in Africa, but also internationally, the problems of landmines remain. I am sure that distinguished delegates will testify in this conference that years after the resolution of conflicts associated with the use of mine, there is still a long way to go before they can achieve the desired status of landmines-free countries. But with determination, cooperation and coordination, this goal will no doubt be realized – probably sooner than later. It is true that most of the countries are strained on resources to address the problem of landmines, but we owe this to the millions on the continent who are at risk of being

maimed, who are left with almost no alternatives for survival because the lands that they would use to eke a livelihood have been rendered inaccessible by landmines.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The AU has taken a leading role in conflict prevention and post conflict reconstruction on the continent – evidenced by the continental peace and security architecture – including the Peace and Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System, and the African Standby Force. You will also note that key documents on peace and security make explicit mention of the problem of landmines. The *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, clearly states that the problems caused by landmines constitute a serious impediment to Africa's social and economic development, and that they can only be resolved within the framework of increased and well coordinated continental cooperation. The *Solemn Declaration on the Common African Defence and Security Policy* lists landmines and unexploded ordinances as one of the threats that engender insecurity. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the AU's economic development program, recognizes that the eradication of landmines is a necessary condition for sustainable growth and development. These basic AU policy documents in peace and security show how linked the problem of landmines is to not only the matters of security, but also to development.

Indeed, Africa's challenge is not the formulation of policies in the area of landmines, but rather, the main challenge facing us now is more on the implementation side. However, the Peace and Security Architecture of the AU provides a framework for addressing the problem of landmines and related issues. The Mine ban Treaty imposes on all of us certain obligations, regardless of our development status. We have already made a good start through the efforts to resolve conflicts – which then enables us to address the problem of landmines. As experience shows, the problem of landmines lingers much longer after the guns have fallen silent – especially for the victims.

A number of Member States affected by the problem of landmines have established demining offices/commissions/centers in order to coordinate mine action, and I believe the distinguished participants from such Member States will share their experiences and challenges during the coming days of deliberations here. I also hope that this forum will strengthen inter-African cooperation. Whereas some of the Regional Economic Communities have established Mine Action Committees, similar initiatives should be established in the other RECs and I would like to call upon the Member States this strategy with their respective RECs in order to ease cooperation and coordination.

I would also like to mention that the African Union is mindful of the important role civil society plays in mitigating the impact of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. Indeed the AU has been collaborating with civil society in the field of landmines, and the Plans of Action resulting from the First and Second Continental Conferences of African Experts on Landmines give civil society a role in mine clearance and in assisting landmine victims among others.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Africa is taking seriously its commitments under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention to curb the proliferation of landmines on the continent. Not only are African governments committed to banning the production and use of antipersonnel landmines on their soil and destroying all their stockpiles, they are also committed to continue providing mine-risk education and awareness creation, mine clearance, and assistance to victims of landmines.

However, this is not say that these processes are without challenges. They remain enormous, and we are well aware that we cannot do this alone. Lack of resources and institutional challenges have slowed the ability of the countries to effectively implement the MBT and the AU's Plan of Action. Thus, the AU continues to rely on support of the international community. Cooperation with all stakeholders remains a necessity if we are to meet our goals.

Finally, I wish to express my hope that the distinguished participants of this Conference will agree on strategies to overcome the challenges the Continent is faced with in fulfilling its obligations to its citizens, and to the international community at large, and that they will reflect our common position as Africa to the Second Review Conference of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction that is scheduled to take place at the end of the year in Cartagena, Colombia.

The AU wishes to thank the South African Government for hosting the meeting, and the European Commission for the financial support. The European Union remains a reliable partner to the AU in the peace and security agenda.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.