

Progress on mine action

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Geoffrey Van ORDEN (ECR, UK) on Progress on Mine Action. Members recall that according to the Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitors, in 1999 there were an estimated 18 000 casualties from anti-personnel landmines (APL) and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) and by 2009 this had fallen to around 4 000. Even though the rate of casualties has been drastically reduced, Members regret the fact that civilians made up 70% of all casualties in 2009 and especially deplore the high proportion of child casualties. They also stress that more than 90 countries are still affected by APL and other ERW to some degree but the most seriously afflicted are Afghanistan, Colombia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos.

Global efforts on mine action: Members applaud the progress that has been made in mine action over the past decade but emphasise that efforts need to be refocused and intensified if the APL threat is to be eliminated within a finite period. They strongly welcome the fact that 156 countries have now signed and ratified the Mine Ban Treaty, including 25 EU Member States, and urge those that have yet to accede to the Treaty to do so. They support fully the implementation of the Cartagena Action Plan, that provides for a detailed five-year plan of commitments in all areas of mine action, and recognise that the US has been the leading global sponsor of mine action. Members urge Russia to accede to the Mine Ban Treaty, noting that Russia was removed from the 2010 list after declaring that it had halted deployment. However, they are concerned that China and Russia have the largest stockpiles of APL with an estimated 100 million and 24.5 million respectively, and urge the EU to include in the negotiations with Russia and China the issue of destroying their existing stockpiles and rapid accession to the Mine Ban Treaty.

Case studies: Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia: the committee examines the situation in certain countries and notes that **Afghanistan** is one of the world's most heavily contaminated countries, with 508 APL and other ERW casualties between March 2009 and March 2010, over half were children. Noting that some USD 80 million were donated by the international community for mine action in Afghanistan in 2009, Members express concern at the apparent unwillingness of the Afghan Government at central and provincial levels to assume responsibility for mine action.

With regard to **Angola**, also one of the most APL-afflicted countries, Members are deeply concerned by the many structural problems highlighted by the Commission's 2009 evaluation, and urge the EU to control the effective use of money. They regret the fact that the extent of the APL/ERW threat is still not known with confidence and that, at current rates of progress, it will take 100 years to clear the country.

With regard to **Bosnia**, Members regret that, 16 years after the end of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is still a high level of APL/ERW contamination, with about 11 000 minefields and an estimated 220 000 active APL and ERW throughout the country. Whilst noting the improvements in mine action management, they regret that the government's principal body in charge of mine action, the Demining Commission, has not met with donor representatives based in Sarajevo for some years and that its members have not attended international meetings of the Mine Ban Treaty since the treaty's Second Review Conference in 2009.

Victim assistance: the committee much regrets the fact that civilians made up 70% of all casualties in 2009 and also regret that landmine survivors or their representative organisations participated in the implementation of victim assistance in less than half of the affected countries. It urges the international community and the EU to significantly increase the proportion of its funding available for victim assistance but not at the expense of mine clearance.

Progress in mine detection and survey techniques: even if advances have been made in mine detection technology, training and techniques - rapid, reliable, cost effective solutions remain elusive and techniques using manual probes inevitably remain in widespread use. Members acknowledge the important contribution of the UN International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) in enhancing the safety and efficiency of mine action but note that the most fruitful prospects for technical advances in detection lie in tailor-made methods based on the combination of a number of technologies. They also recognise that properly conducted survey is only as valuable as the accuracy and efficiency of subsequent reporting. They call for the Commission to allocate further research funding to mine survey and detection technologies and techniques.

Towards an end to the APL threat: the committee is concerned that some of the countries which suffer from APL affliction are relying too much on international financial assistance for mine action and not deploying enough of their own resources in manpower or revenue (particularly Angola). It is also concerned at the diversion of resources into 'mine clearance' in areas where there is little threat in humanitarian or economic development terms to the detriment of a focus on areas of high threat to life. There must be greater emphasis on improved planning and management of operations. Members express concern at the **poor security and control of military magazines holding weapons and explosive ordnance, including landmines, particularly in countries in revolt and disorder**. They believe that the international community should focus its attention on those countries least able to help themselves and on mine clearance and assistance to victims. They urge donors to provide funding with more effective targeting, monitoring and evaluation.

Members also call for the following:

- efforts to be concentrated on developing greater local capacity, which may include specially trained local personnel on a structured and professional basis or greater use of military units in post conflict situations;
- improved national planning, drawing on best practice, and enhanced international coordination of mine action that more effectively targets resources to areas of priority need;
- a reliable census of the current number of victims of APL/ERW/IED and a proper analysis be made as a guide to targeting resources more effectively, with greater consideration being given to the needs of victims and their families;
- standardising methods of monitoring and evaluating the cost effectiveness of mine actions, so that they are more open to comparison and scrutiny on a country-by-country basis.

The committee regrets that, since the elimination of the EU's dedicated budget line in 2007, the EU has lacked an instrument that is flexible and multi-country in nature, responding coherently to mine action priorities, and that there is, in quantitative terms, a drop in overall EU funding for mine action.

It calls therefore for the restoration of a more dedicated approach, **with one budget line under one lead directorate that will signal the strength of the EU's continued commitment to mine action**. It also calls on the Commission to update its 'Guidelines on European Community Mine Action 2008-2013', to reflect proposed changes in the institutional and funding architecture, to ensure more rapid and flexible dispersal of funds, to provide clear instructions to access funding, focusing on the most urgent priorities and best practice, to foresee 'packages' of assistance to enable the most needy countries to comply with their Mine Ban Treaty obligations and to monitor and evaluate properly the effectiveness of funding.

Lastly, Members underline that mine action should form a compulsory element of country strategies where mines are known to exist and/or to be stockpiled and call for better international coordination and prioritisation, and more astute and better use of funds for a world free of the APL threat to life within a finite period.