

Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies

*Thank you for giving me the opportunity to update
I. Problem So that you have the overview of the m4
process in Eritrea*

Eritrea has a critical landmine and UXO problem that has contributed to a slow recovery from both the 30-year struggle for independence which ended in 1991, and the border conflict with Ethiopia from 1998-2001. A landmine impact survey (or LIS) based on Survey Working Group Protocols has been completed. It is now known that every region of the country is impacted by mines, the most serious contamination occurring in provinces bordering Ethiopia and the Northeastern portion of the country. According to the LIS, over 655,000 people are impacted in 481 communities, which collectively contain nearly one thousand mined areas. 33 of these communities have been classified as high priority, 100 medium priority and 348 low priority.

II. Plan

I. The LIS indicates that there have been 5,385 known mine victims, an overwhelming majority of which were young people between the ages of 5 and 29, often engaged in herding livestock. Landmines tend to be found along trench lines, in former military camps, villages and water sources in every region of the country, and near the border with Ethiopia. The extent of clearance needed is massive.

Mines and UXO are hindering Eritrea's recovery and development. Some 64,000 IDPs and refugees remain in camps as many of their villages are contaminated. Development and private sector investment are threatened by the mine and UXO problem, which complicates initiatives to increase food security, the construction of new schools, housing, hospitals and business ventures. Eritrea has responded to this problem by establishing the appropriate national structures in policy making, planning, clearance, victims support and mine risk education.

II. Eritrea's *vision* of what mine action will produce is "a physical environment that will permit free movement, uninhibited development and poverty reduction initiatives; where victims are assisted and integrated into society, and no new victims are occurring due to mines and UXO."

III. The *strategic objectives* that relate to this vision, and will form the backbone of the strategic plan, are:

1. Mine Risk Education (or MRE), marking and clearance completed to permit the return of IDPs and Refugees;
2. Mine clearance and marking complete in LIS priority communities;
3. An effective and integrated MRE Programme that reduces new casualties, identifies UXO locations, and conducts community relations;
4. A Victim Support system in place that will provide effective assistance to the large group of existing victims and serve new requirements; and
5. Address development priorities.

The Eritrean Demining Authority has mobilized every asset to address the Government's first objective of returning IDPs and refugees to their villages. At the moment this consists of 3 large manual clearance teams, 6 MRE teams, a community network for Victims Support, and 2 RONCO manual clearance teams and 18 mine detection dogs. Changing community needs will be identified by MRE teams and post-clearance impact assessment teams.

IV. The vision and strategic objectives are extremely important components of Eritrea's Mine Action Strategic Plan, which is being formed through dialogue between national Mine Action organizations and the National Strategic Planning Steering Committee. Unforeseen tasks may arise, therefore this Steering Committee will be responsible for making modifications to the strategic plan when required.

V. As the planning process is not yet complete, it is preferable to defer comments about the exact funding required until accurate calculations can be made. Eritrea will be pleased to provide this information at a future point.

III. Progress

Progress has been made in ensuring that Eritrea fulfills its treaty obligations. Following the country's signature of the Mine Ban Treaty on August 27th 2001, the Government of Eritrea issued Proclamation 123 to create the Eritrean Demining Authority that manages all mine action at the executive level. Eritrean Demining Operations was established as the executing agency. The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare plans and conducts victim support activities, with support from the ministries of Health and Education. The ministries of Information and Education are involved in MRE.

Since 2002, very important steps have been taken. In January 2003 the headquarters of the Eritrean Demining Authority and Eritrean Demining Operations were established, and they approved the *Interim Eritrean National Mine Action Framework*. The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare created a model for victim support that utilizes existing structures of its community-based rehabilitation program, and approved a 4-year plan to 2006 entitled *Directions to Establish a Model Victim Support Utilising Community Based Rehabilitation in Eritrea*. The LIS has been conducted, and the strategic plan will be complete by October 2004. Equipment was gathered throughout 2003, allowing for the deployment of 6 MRE teams in September 2003 and 3 sixty person manual clearance teams last December. The Government of Eritrea has also accepted IMAS, and teams are working to these standards. The Clearance statistics since the deployment of these teams have been extremely encouraging.

Considerable *progress* has been made in achieving ^{these} goals in MRE. ~~The~~ EDO's six MRE teams in different parts of the country have provided MRE to over 132,450 people, 109,000 of which were children. These teams deliver MRE and collect data on accident victims and mine/UXO discoveries. The programme will soon expand by recruiting and training individuals in 35 highly-affected communities to serve as community focal points on a voluntary basis. The *expected results* of this programme are a reduction in incidents, the existence of safe behavior among populations at

risk and the efficient flow of information between communities, MRE teams, Eritrean mine action organizations and the recording of this information in IMSMA.

Overall clearance figures since 2000 :

AP mines cleared	4,781
AT mines cleared	2,557
UXO cleared	50,399
Total areas cleared	52,484, 762 m ²

Mine action is imperative for rehabilitation and development projects and private ventures to move forward in Eritrea, however, mine action is underrepresented in development and poverty reduction strategies. The Eritrean Demining Authority is taking measures to correct this oversight, but insufficient resources and capacity in mine action could endanger the implementation of development strategies,

VI. Priorities

Priorities for realizing the strategic plan that will need outside assistance are:

1. Increase manual clearance capacity. Our intention is to have 11 twenty person teams by the end of 2004, with an approximate requirement for 50 such teams by 2009.
2. Retain and increase the current mine detection dog capacity.
3. Establish a locally manufactured mechanical capacity.
4. Increase MRE resources along with clearance capacity to make an integrated approach possible.
5. Deliver a comprehensive victim support programme.
6. Increased capacity to carry out post-clearance impact assessment.

The outside assistance required for these priorities will consist of both monetary needs and technical equipments assistance, although this is difficult to accurately quantify until the strategic plan is complete in October 2004; at that time, accurate figures will be available.