

Thank you Co Chair for allowing me to comment on the Rwandan Mine Action Program.

Introduction.

The mine ban treaty went into force for Rwanda in December 2000. Since then and a few years before it went into force, the problem of Anti-personnel mines and their devastating effects were being and continue to be addressed and significant progress has been recorded in the fight against this scourge.

Rwanda reiterates the fact that she does not produce anti personnel mines, and has no Anti-personnel stockpiles. We have however continued to submit relevant reports in accordance and in compliance with the Mine Ban Treaty. Mine clearance activities, but at a slow pace, continue to be carried out, disabled people to include Mine Victims continue to be cared for, legal and administrative measures on the Mine Ban Treaty have been drafted and are in promising stages.

Background

The Landmine crisis in Rwanda date as far back as the 1990 to 1994 liberation war. They were used as weapons of war to frustrate the advance of Rwandese Patriotic Army troops then during the fall of Kigali Capital City. Land mines and other explosive ordnances were also used as weapons during genocide.

More land mines were laid during the 1996-1998 insurgency war in the North of the Country.

After these different wars, these mines became an impediment to the social economic rehabilitation of Rwanda, but worst of all, became a threat to the lives of people that were returning to their homes.

Response of the Rwanda Government to the Problem.

As a response to this problem, in 1995, the Rwanda National Demining Office was established to address this threat. The NDO initially operated in a hasty way to get rid of all scattered UXOs and

land mines that were being sighted in the population with intention of reducing the number of mine victims that were at a fast rate. And later efforts were consolidated to clear the minefields.

Achievements

By late 2001, a number of achievements had been registered. They include but not limited to the following:

- More than 25,000 mines and explosives remnants of war had been destroyed.
- With the participation of the National Demining Office, hundreds of Kilometers of commercial roads had been reopened.
- Tea plantations had been cleared from anti personnel mines and factories have reopened.
- Several commercial centers had been cleared and reopened.
- Farmlands had been cleared and agricultural activities had resumed.
- As a result of intensive mine risk education (MRE), casualty figures had reduced considerably.
- More than 600,000 people had been resettled without fear of being killed.
- About 24 small minefields had been successfully cleared to mention but a few.

However, it should be noted that with all these achievements, the Rwanda National Demining Office was limited in several aspects and these limitations affected to a big extent the rate of clearance.

First, the extent of the landmine problems in Rwanda was not known. There were no reports pertaining to where land mines had been laid especially because all the former government forces who had laid those mines had fled to neighboring countries.

Secondly, the National Demining Office was under equipped and under manned for the mandate. There were no proper tools to address the vegetation aspect of our minefields and this was a major set back to the clearance tempo. Relying on metal detectors in heavily vegetated minefields that are also characterized by high ferrous content was tedious and laborious.

Thirdly, some of the minefields were on steep slope and were associated with land slides that could wash the land mines down valley or could re-bury them to a depth that could not be picked using the normal swiping procedure with a metal detector. These problems mentioned above reduced the speed of minefield clearance greatly.

Up to 2002 The NDO was operating but the extent of the land mine threat was still unknown.

A national land mine survey to determine the extent of the problem was sponsored by the US Government and was conducted from the end of 2002 and ended in the beginning of 2003. After the survey, it was found out that only 52% of the land mine affected area had been successfully cleared while 48% remained un cleared.

It was also found out that the remaining minefields were very challenging compared to the ones that had been completed and thus required additional means especially mechanical assets that were and are still un available to National Demining Office.

Unfortunately, it was at the completion of the survey that the only donor to the Demining Program started reducing the demining financial support and eventually, by June 2004 this assistance was completely closed down. This closure of financial support left the NDO confined to reacting only to hasty reports while big minefields remain untouched.

Signs of this closure had been begun in 2000, when our donor terminated the budget for MRE.

At the inception of the Demining Program, a Mine Risk Education program was put in place and campaigns could be staged via the media, (Radio and News papers), face-to-face campaigns could also be staged in specific targeted groups especially in schools, in market places etc. Relevant Mine Awareness products could also be distributed throughout the population.

This approach of MRE had resulted into a sense of awareness in the population and consequently, had resulted to a drastic decrease in

the number of land mine related casualties. Land mine reporting system had improved given that, during campaigns, mined areas, individual mines and UXOS and mine victims could be reported easily.

The closure of this MRE budget has had severe consequences. Recent years have seen a slow increase in the number of mine/UXOS victims. Last year, 11 people were reported as mine victims. Since January 2005, 14 people have also been reported; that is an increment of 03 people since we submitted the report as per article 7 of the Convention.

This situation in its self does not portray the real image of mine victims in Rwanda. It is possible that there are more victims that were or are never reported to the National Demining Office (NDO) for recording.

As the NDO reaction to this situation, operational teams continue to deploy with MRE teams so as to keep the population in the vicinity of mined areas informed and warned not to stray in mined areas. Local leaders were also associated to this campaign.

I should however admit that this method of MRE is not effective in its self. It requires intensive campaigns that the NDO is currently unable to conduct due to lack of resources.

Marking signs have also been posted on the minefields to warn the population but the unfortunate thing is that, these marking signs are temporary in nature but are also frequently removed by curious children as they look after domestic animals.

The Rwanda Government, with little resources continues to allocate resources in the mine action activities. However this budget is limited compared to the enormous resources required for demining operations. Since the closure of the donor demining financial support, with the little resources from the Rwanda government, the NDO has at a very slow pace continued to operate.

Last year, about 800 explosive remnants of war were destroyed, 04 mine casualty evacuations were conducted and about 20,000 sqm of

land (part of the known minefields) was cleared. Since January 2005, even with the limited resources, the NDO continues to operate and have managed (manually) to clear about 4000 sqm of land.

Current land mine threat.

As already mentioned, the 2002 landmine survey revealed about 20 minefields. 04 of them have since been cleared.

Rwanda remains with 16 known medium and small minefields accounting for about 900, 600 sqm of land, which is all good Agricultural land that has been abandoned by owners. This has added pressure to the already existing land pressure resulting from a high rate of population growth.

On top of the known minefield, the NDO continues to react to on call hasty reports of individual sighted mines and UXOS throughout the country.

And as already mentioned, we have began to see careless behaviors that had disappeared years ago when we used to conduct intensive MRE and these careless behaviors has resulted to a renewed rise of casualty cases in the population. The most affected being children and people of young age as they pursuit routine activities necessary for survival.

Constraints

The Rwanda Demining Program is currently handicapped by lack of support, and I am afraid to mention that if not assisted, Rwanda may not attain her clearance deadline.

As mentioned, the remaining minefields are very challenging. They are heavily vegetated, and a few of them are on steep slopes. This requires additional means currently unavailable to the NDO.

The Mine Detection Dog program is no longer in place following the retirement of all MDD that had exceeded their working life. These were no longer effective.

The only Demining tools available to the NDO (the metal detectors) have started to register defects because they have operated for long without repair and these need to be replaced.

The logistical capability to support operations has also deteriorated.

Basing on the current nucleus of well-trained Deminers, the Rwanda Government has put in place the plan to clear the remaining minefields, by increasing the Demining force so as to allow simultaneous deployment of all the minefields in order to realize the 2010 clearance deadline. But this plan will largely depend on availability of resources.

The pressing needs to this plan are:

- Mechanical assets for 02 big minefields (Kanombe in Kigali City and Nyabishambi).
- Mine detection dog assets.
- Metal detectors.
- Funds for MRE.
- Logistical support to cover operational expenses.
- Training of IMSMA.
- Training of operations managers and other staffs.

The required budget to bring back the program on track and run operations for the remaining period has been estimated to about 2.700.000 USD and we believe this can accomplish about 95% of the remaining minefields. That is why the assistance of the international community to declare Rwanda mine free is crucial.

Before the end of my presentation, may I remind you that for my Country, a report as per article 7 of the Convention has been submitted. This is to make a correction on the information written in the Land Mine Monitor Fact Sheet (prepared by Human Right Watch) that I read yesterday, showing that Rwanda is among 56 Countries that have not submitted their Annual report. Also in support to this I have given a copy of the sent report to a Representative of Land Mine Monitor.

Thank you all for your attention.