

**Speech by the Chair Person of the South Sudan Demining Authority**

**Brigadier Barach Jurkuch Barach**

*at*

**Standing Committee of the State Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction,**

*also known as*

**Mine Ban Treaty Inter Sessional**

**Geneva 2011**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to address you on behalf of the South Sudan Demining Authority, or SSDA.

I must first thank the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and also the Implementation Support Unit for their warm welcome, hospitality and continuing support to mine affected nations such as Sudan. Your continued effort to bring together donors, beneficiary countries and supporting organizations has been a crucial contribution to the history of Mine Action. It will continue to be. Despite all this talk about 'programme maturity', some countries and territories still have no end in sight for the landmine problem and will continue to lean on international support.

I mentioned Sudan as we are still one country. From 9<sup>th</sup> July we hope to transition peacefully to become the world's baby, its newest country: Southern Sudan will become the Republic of South Sudan.

Of course the common perception of this event is that it is a 'divorce'. Whilst North and South are going separate ways, we hope that History will reflect that South Sudan's independence will be viewed as the happy birth of a new child. Neither North or South want any of the bad things that go with divorce – including lawyers!

So, to our brothers and sisters in the North, I hope that we will continue to sit together as friends in future meetings, insh'allah. This is my special greeting to you.

Now let me say a few words about South Sudan. In the past few months our region has become unstable and the activities of rebel groups have caused many problems. They will continue to cause insecurity in the new nation. It is with great misfortune that I must report to this Standing Committee that landmines are being laid once more in South Sudan.

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This is not being done by the Sudan People's Liberation Army, which along with the Sudan Armed Forces are the only recognized militaries in Sudan. Our SPLA soldiers are actually some of the victims and several soldiers have been killed.

These acts, which are contrary to Sudan's obligations under the Mine Ban Treaty and also against the 2010 Mine Action Act of Sudan and South Sudan's Penal Code, are criminal in nature.

Whatever the legalities, innocent people are already amongst the victims. People like the four women killed when a vehicle of international NGO 'World Relief International' was destroyed by a newly laid anti-tank mine on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. People like the two ladies who stood on newly laid anti-personnel mines in northern Jonglei state on 4<sup>th</sup> March. These are civilian deaths happening right now, due to new landmines, planted fourteen years after Princess Diana's landmark trip to Angola, the Ottawa process and Nobel laureates for ICBL.

We at the SSDA, along with the Ministries we work with in the Government of South Sudan, condemn any use of indiscriminate weapons of war and after recent workshops in Juba led by experts on international treaties we understand very well how vital the mine ban is. We fully intend to join "Ottawa" as soon as we are able and will endeavour to adhere to its principles and obligations.

Ladies and gentlemen:

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On this day, I ask you all in the most respectful terms to understand the difficult process that our nation is undergoing. We need the continued support of the United Nations, and the international agencies such as Norwegian People's Aid and Mines Advisory Group who have walked our path through peace and war.

Of course we need the continued support of donors who have been both patient and kind. Kind because they have not forgotten South Sudan, patient because we too live in the frustrations associated with nation building from scratch.

I ask you to join us in condemning those who use landmines, anti-tank or anti-personnel. I ask you to not support those who do.

Some final comments. I am not an IMSMA technician. However my advisors from the United Nations inform me of a worrying thing that IMSMA tells us. At the start of this Demining season, there was only Six years of work left in South Sudan at current capacity. That figure should be reducing. Unfortunately we still are learning, through Survey, that the mine problem in South Sudan is far higher than what we originally thought. For every minefield cleared in Jonglei, more are reported. And then there is the new mine laying.

On that note, I look forward to working with our partners to solve what should be a finite problem. We have achieved much in Mine Action in South Sudan and will overcome this obstacle, safe in the knowledge that as long as human hands do not sow more mines, mines themselves cannot reproduce.

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Thank you and God bless.