

Press Release

Denmark clears World War II minefield, declares itself free of mines

Geneva and Copenhagen, 5 July 2012 – Denmark has become the latest country to declare its territory free of anti-personnel mines after clearing one last Second World War minefield situated on the Skallingen Peninsula on Denmark’s west coast. In doing so, Denmark has become the 20th State Party to the 1997 Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, or Ottawa Convention, to have complied with its mine clearance obligations.

The completion ceremony was presided over by Denmark’s Minister of Transport, Henrik Dam KRISTENSEN who detonated the last dangerous objects found during the demining effort: “I am proud that Denmark has fulfilled its Ottawa Convention commitments,” said Minister KRISTENSEN, whose ministry was charged with overseeing the clearance of hazardous areas on the peninsula.

“The Skallingen Peninsula is a dynamic landscape with mines emplaced in areas of shifting sand dunes and on beaches, where sand has significantly changed its position over time,” said Minister KRISTENSEN. “As well, Skallingen is a protected area, given its environmental value. An environmental assessment was required and demining operations had to comply with restrictions on the use of vehicles and explosives in order to avoid disturbing colonies of rare breeding birds.”

“The Danish Coastal Authority, the division of the Ministry of Transport responsible for establishing and managing the demining plan, should be commended for its efforts,” said Minister KRISTENSEN. “The Danish Coastal Authority ensured that mine clearance was carried out to a high standard without causing irreparable damage to the natural environment or wildlife.”

During the Second World War, an estimated 1.4 million mines were deployed in Denmark, with most of these removed between 1945 and 1947. When Denmark signed the Convention in 1997, approximately 300 hectares of area suspected to contain mines remained on the Skallingen Peninsula. Surveys and reviews of old minefield maps reduced this to 186 hectares, which were then divided into three areas. The first two areas were cleared between 2005 and 2008, resulting in the release of 66 hectares. Clearance of the final area took place between July 2010 and June 2012, with the remaining 120 hectares released.

“While Denmark’s challenges in removing mines from its territory may have been different from those faced by Cambodia and other countries in our region, the difficulties that Denmark had to overcome were significant,” said H.E. PRAK Sokhonn, the senior Cambodian Minister who presides over the Convention. “Denmark should be applauded for demonstrating that every State has a role to play in achieving a mine-free world.”

“The world is a better place because of Denmark’s strong commitment to this cause,” added H.E. PRAK Sokhonn, noting that, in addition to having completed implementation of its mine clearance obligations, Denmark also complied with the Convention requirement to destroy all stockpiled anti-personnel mines having ensured over a decade ago, the destruction of approximately 270,000 mines.

Denmark was one of the first States to have joined the Convention and is also one of the world's most significant financial contributors to demining, having annually provided approximately €10 million to support mine clearance in several developing countries.

It is expected that Denmark will submit a formal declaration of completion of its mine clearance obligations during the Convention's 3-7 December 2012 Twelfth Meeting of the States Parties, which will take place at the United Nations' headquarters in Geneva.

The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

The AP Mine Ban Convention was adopted in Oslo in 1997, opened for signature in Ottawa the same year and entered into force on 1 March, 1999.

To date 160 States have joined the Convention 155 of them no longer hold stocks of anti-personnel mines. Over 44.5 million mines have been destroyed by the States Parties.

Of the 56 States Parties that have reported mined areas, 20, including Denmark, have completed implementation of their mine clearance obligations. Demining has resulted in millions of square metres of once dangerous land being released for normal human activity.

Of the 50 States that at one time manufactured anti-personnel mines, 34 are now bound by the Convention's ban on production. Most other parties have put in place moratoria on production and / or transfers of mines.

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For media questions regarding the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, please contact Laila Rodriguez at l.rodriquez@APMineBanConvention.org or at +41 22 906 16 56.

For media questions regarding Denmark's efforts to comply with the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, please contact Jesper Damm Olsen, Head of the Press Section at the Denmark's Ministry of Transport at +45 40 85 93 88 or email: trm@trm.dk. Visit the Danish Ministry of Transport website: <http://trm.dk/en/>.

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